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A Performance Guide to Arthur Bliss's Sonata for Viola and Piano

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A PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO ARTHUR BLISS'S SONATA FOR VIOLA AND PIANO

DMA Project

A DMA Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in
the College of Fine Arts
at the University of Kentucky

By

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ABSTRACT OF DMA PROJECT

A PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO ARTHUR BLISS'S
SONATA FOR VIOLA AND PIANO

Arthur Bliss's Sonata for Viola and Piano stands as a significant achievement in early twentieth-century chamber music for viola and is the result of a fruitful collaboration between composer and virtuoso performer. Multiple scholars recognize the sonata as one of Bliss's finest works. Despite these accolades, the work has failed to attract sustained scholarly investigation. This document provides performers with the necessary tools for a thorough and contextualized presentation of the work. The main body of this study details the technical aspects of performing the sonata: viola technique, expressive challenges, and ensemble concerns. Preceding this, I cover the relevant biographical details from Bliss's life, examine the roots of his chamber music writing for viola by analyzing two early works, and investigate the collaboration between Lionel Tertis and Bliss in creating this work.

KEYWORDS: Viola, Arthur Bliss, Lionel Tertis, Viola pedagogy, Sonata for viola and piano

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The body of viola music from early 20th-century England has emerged as a promising topic of study and fertile resource for performers seeking new and underplayed recital repertoire. Several factors contribute to this area's appeal: its association with a trailblazing viola virtuoso, the emergence of the viola as a solo instrument, and the works' particular brand of tonality. Arthur Bliss's Sonata for Viola and Piano embodies all of these attributes and a thorough study of it promises great rewards. Although the piece has yet to enter the standard recital repertoire for viola, its aching and twisted lyricism, virtuoso writing for the instrument, and monumental scope make it a worthy addition to any violist's repertoire.

1.2 Need for this study

Scholars have not published any extended scholarly examinations of Bliss's Viola Sonata and writings concerning it are similarly rare in non-scholarly musical publications. The most in-depth study of this work is Hubert Foss's four-page overview in the March 1934 edition of *The Musical Times*. Outside of this, scholarly and popular publications barely mention the sonata. The dearth of published studies of the sonata is lamentable, especially given the significant effort that Bliss invested in writing this work, his noteworthy collaboration with Lionel Tertis, and the general consensus among scholars ranking the sonata as among the finest of Bliss's chamber works.

From a wider vantage point, the works written for the viola in the early 20th century in England represent an exponential expansion not only in quantity, but also in

the musical quality, expressive depth, and technical demands of viola literature up until that point. This sudden surge of literature for the viola is one of the great outpourings of music written for a single instrument in musical history. While other works in this body of 20th-century English viola literature have been studied thoroughly—including those by York Bowen, William Walton, and Ralph Vaughan Williams—a study of Bliss's equivalently large and important sonata is noticeably absent. George Dannatt, a noted Bliss scholar and the composer's friend, wrote that this work "deserves, and would repay, close study."[1] This document seeks to fill this scholarly void and provide added insight into Bliss's sonata.

The fact that Bliss's Sonata is relatively unknown to violists underscores the need for this study and can be attributed to several factors. Bliss, perhaps unjustly, has not attracted the same level of scholarly attention as many of his contemporaries. Despite his multifaceted musical life and substantial compositional output, a full-length life and works study has yet to appear. As Giles Easterbrook states:

> his [Bliss's] true commanding stature as a pivotal figure is emerging only now to clamour for research and evaluation. Its delay is due partly to a certain innate diffidence, partly to a certain stylistic isolation, or individualism, which placed him outside the prevailing currents of British music.[2]

The Sonata's lack of prominence is due also to the technical demands on both performers. The viola part is as difficult as the major concerti, such as Walton, Bartók,

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[1] George Dannatt, "Introduction" in *Arthur Bliss: Catalogue of the Complete Works*, by Lewis Foreman (Kent, England: Novello, 1980), 15.
[2] Giles Easterbook, "Forward," in *Arthur Bliss: A Source Book* by Stewart Craggs (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1996), xiii-xiv.

and Hindemith. Finally, in a crowded field, some early 20th-century British additions to the viola literature have, inevitably, received less attention than others.

1.3 Scope and Limitations

The aim of this study is to provide information that will aid in the performance of Bliss's sonata. Biographical information about Bliss will provide the performer with a historical context in which to place this artwork, and a survey of Bliss's compositions will allow for a deeper understanding of his own compositional preferences and generic choices.

A musical analysis of the work will provide the performer with knowledge of the essential structures present within the work, while a performance guide will offer practical advice, specific to this sonata, on technical issues, choice of tone color, stylistic characteristics, and solving the ensemble challenges presented by the work. This document will not be an exhaustive analysis of Bliss's life and primary source material.

1.4 Literature Review

There are four research guides for Arthur Bliss: Kenneth Thompson's "Catalogue of Works" (1966), Lewis Foreman's *Arthur Bliss: Catalogue of the Complete Works* (1980), and Stewart R. Craggs's *Arthur Bliss: A Bio-Bibliography* (1988) and *Arthur Bliss: A Source Book* (1996). The clear organization and wealth of information in Craggs's *Source Book* make it the best starting point for researching Bliss and his work. Following an alphabetical list of main compositions, a thirty-five-page chronology

provides information about Bliss's life, performing history, compositions, publishing history, and professional activities, including his family history beginning in 1847 and celebrations of his music until 1991. The largest section of this book features a 161-page list of manuscripts and first editions. Organized alphabetically by the composition's title, each entry provides a complete description of each work, including a catalogue number, date of composition, instrumentation, physical description of the score (measurements, paper type, etc.), paginated list of elements of each item, publication information, price, location of the item, and many more points of information. The next section examines Bliss's letters in two subsections: part 1 lists the correspondents and their professional affiliations with whom Bliss communicated, and part 2 categorizes specific letters by the compositions referred to in each letter. The book's final two sections are a recording list and a select bibliography that, in addition to a "general" heading, categorizes entries based on composition.

While Craggs's *Bio-bibliography,* Thompson's Catalogue, and Foreman's "Catalogue of Complete Works" are superseded by Craggs's *Source Book*, these three works nevertheless supplement the *Source Book* in helpful ways. Thompson's "Catalogue of Works" appeared in the August 1966 issue of *The Musical Times*. It is the first catalogue of Bliss's works, and each of the 105 entries contains basic information: work title, instrumentation, date of composition, dedicatee, movements, date of premiere, publisher, and other information if relevant (prizes, notable performances, recordings). A twenty-four-item list of Bliss's writings follows the works list, and the catalogue concludes with a twenty-eight-item list of articles about Bliss's music. On the occasion of Bliss's 80th birthday (see below), Thompson compiled a supplement to the original

catalogue, with additions in every category. It was published in the August 1971 edition of *The Musical Times.*

Lewis Foreman's *Catalogue of Complete Works* (1980) is a much more substantial and informative catalogue than Thompson's. Organized by genre, this catalogue is printed in a large format that allows for more specific details about each work, including instrumentation, duration of sections, first performances and performers. In comparison to Craggs's *Bio-Bibliography*, Foreman focuses on descriptions of the works themselves, at the expense of descriptions of the manuscripts or printed editions. In this sense, Foreman and Craggs's works supplement each other, as the latter's catalogue presents specific and physical information about the printed music. Perhaps the most valuable element of this catalogue is Dannatt's excellent Introduction, a 20-page survey of Bliss's life and works, the most detailed of its kind in print. Dannatt, who had a personal relationship with the composer, fashions his introduction as a survey of the works that also provides relevant biographical information. A concluding three-page section offers an appraisal of Bliss's general style along with the composers and musical trends that influenced him. Dannatt's analysis of the composers and trends that shaped Bliss in this section is the most erudite examination of its kind in print.

Bliss appears frequently in both general dictionaries and works pertaining to British music. General music dictionaries treat Bliss as a not insignificant, though not major, composer. Interestingly, Andrew Burn's article in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* contains a far greater amount of detail than Burn's and Hugo Cole's article in the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* perhaps indicating Bliss's higher standing in the British world as opposed to the musical world. John Caldwell's two-

volume *The Oxford History of English Music* affords Bliss a single page of its total 1342 pages, on par with the amount given to Edmund Rubbra and Constant Lambert, and less than the amount devoted to composers such as Herbert Howes and Arnold Bax.

Bliss appears in nearly all studies examining modern English music and the "English Musical Renaissance." In general, writers praise him for his technical skills and workman-like approach to composition (Howes's "resourceful musician" and "a steady and studious worker"[3]), while citing him as lacking imagination. Without exception, scholars look most favorably upon his early, more progressive, Stravinsky- and French-influenced works: *Rout* (1920), *Converstations* (1920), and *Mêlée Fantasque* (1921). Coming in second place for most writers are Bliss's large-scale orchestral and choral works: *A Colour Symphony* (1921–2), *Meditations on a Theme by John Blow* (1955), and *Morning Heroes* (1929–30). His chamber works are hardly mentioned outside of a few references to the extra-musical inspirations behind the clarinet and oboe quintets.

Given his historical vantage point, Norman Demuth's writings understandably showcase an inclination towards Bliss's earlier pieces. In a 1930 article in *The Sackbut,* Demuth praises Bliss's early works, casting Bliss as "a power in the land," and writing that "his utterances were direct and purposeful; they were exhilarating and exciting."[4] Also including comparisons to Stravinsky, Demuth's article abounds in hopeful praise for Bliss's works. In his larger work, *Musical Trends in the 20th Century*, coming twenty-two years after *The Sackbut* article, Demuth tempers his enthusiasm for Bliss. In the three pages that he devotes to Bliss, Demuth uses him as a bridge from the French Les Six to

[3] Frank Howes, *The English Musical Renaissance* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), 266.
[4] Norman Demuth, "Arthur Bliss," *The Sackbut* (September 1930), 46.

English modern composers. While more space is given to Bax, Vaughan Williams, and Delius, Demuth grants Bliss greater significance than composers such as Dale and Bridge, especially due to his early works. He praises Bliss for his "energy and vitality . . . at a time when music in this country lacked stamina . . . and adopted a flaccid and uncertain technique." But as his appraisal progresses, Demuth laments Bliss's inability to influence younger composers towards the later stages of his life, which "make one a little fearful for the future," painting him as increasingly out of touch: "his style has ceased to be applicable to the present time," and as "one of the few composers who has progressed backward."[5]

Criticism focused specifically on Bliss is more prevalent in individual articles and journals—especially *The Musical Times*—than in book-length studies. The main collection of Bliss articles is *Arthur Bliss: Music and Literature,* edited by Stewart R. Craggs. Although the Viola Sonata is hardly mentioned throughout the collection, several essays provide valuable insight into Bliss's compositional style, especially Robert Meikle's "Metamorphic Variation: The Orchestra Music." As for journals, *The Musical Times* leads in terms of the sheer number of articles published on Bliss. Additionally, the journal dedicated its August 1966 and 1971 issues to Bliss in honor of his seventy-fifth and eightieth birthdays, respectively. These two issues include Thompson's aforementioned Catalogue, a personal memoir by J.B. Priestly, a general survey of works by Christopher Palmer, and an overview of Bliss's ballet music by Clement Crisp.

Christopher Palmer also wrote a twenty-four-page book entitled *Bliss* (1976), a part of the Novello Short Biographies series. Its scope is similar to Dannatt's Introduction

[5] Norman Demuth, *Musical Trends in the 20th Century* (Westport: Greenpoint Press, 1952), 124.

in Foreman's *Catalogue*: short-form life and works with brief analysis and evaluation of select pieces. In terms of analysis, the short format allows for no more than a paragraph's worth of commentary on any specific work. Generally, Palmer focuses more on the works rather than biographical details. In one instance, Palmer takes a stance against the prevailing scholarly consensus. Regarding Bliss's early important works—*Rout, Conversations, Madam Noy,* and *Rhapsody*—he contends that their avant-garde characteristics are overblown, calling them "superficial" at best. In his conclusion, he grapples with Bliss's Englishness vs. continentalism.

The only other book-length secondary source focused on Bliss is John Sugden's *Bliss,* published in 1997 as part of the series The Illustrated Lives of the Great Composers. Its 131 pages trace Bliss's life and works in chronological order, with photographs and figures populating nearly every page. Differing from Palmer's more scholarly-oriented book, this work reads more like a mass-market biography and contains little if any musical analysis. It contains extensive quotations from Bliss's autobiography *As I Remember*, and Sugden frequently includes excerpts from newspaper reviews. Though its format leaves much to be desired from a scholarly perspective, Sugden's work nevertheless stands as a valuable resource and the most comprehensive biography of Bliss in print.

Secondary literature pertaining to Bliss's viola sonata is scarce. Two main items comprise of the majority of scholarship about the sonata: Hubert Foss's four-page article "Classicism and Arthur Bliss: His New Viola Sonata" from the March 1934 edition of *The Musical Times,* and Bliss's own short analysis of the sonata (see below). While Foss's discursive essay is by no measure a heavy-hitting and deep analysis, it

nevertheless outlines the themes and provides a few insightful observations. He concludes the essay with some of the highest praise for the sonata found in print:

> Of the game shot down by Tertis's inimitable skill, I should be inclined to claim this Sonata as one of the first in importance. For it occupies a place of importance in the career of Bliss as a composer, and unless I am greatly mistaken, a rare one in the annals of modern English music.[6]

Outside of these two items, the sonata is mentioned only briefly in Bliss and viola literature. George Dannatt praises the sonata in his preface to Foreman's *Catalogue* while simultaneously lamenting its underappreciated status:

> The Clarinet quintet . . . is one of his [Bliss's] best-known works, whereas the viola sonata . . . is probably the least well known. In the opinion of the writer the viola sonata is one which deserves, and would repay, close study; in this coherent work full of cross-references and containing in the "Furiante" section one of the most telling climaxes in music for a stringed instrument and piano, Bliss has given the soloist exceptional problems in the manipulation of that difficult instrument. The Sonata is really a concerto for a virtuoso player.[7]

Andrew Burn includes the Viola Sonata in his listing of Bliss's "string of fine achievements" in his "golden decade" of the 1930s, alongside works such as *Morning Heroes,* the Clarinet Quintet, and *Checkmate.*[8] Writing in 1946, Alec Robertson, in his chapter on Bliss in *British Music of Our Time*, taps the viola sonata as one of Bliss's three noteworthy chamber works. He jocularly states that it "is not an easy work to get to grips with, but it is very well worth a good wrestling match."[9]

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[6] Hubert Foss, "Classicism and Arthur Bliss: His New Viola Sonata," *The Musical Times* 75, no. 1093 (March 1934), 217.
[7] Dannatt, 15–16.
[8] Andrew Burn, "From Rebel to Romantic, the Music of Arthur Bliss," *The Musical Times* 132 no. 1782 (August 1991), 383.
[9] Robertson, 157.

Of the primary sources related to the viola sonata, two memoirs offer a few more bits of information: Bliss's *As I Remember* (1970) and Tertis's *My Viola and I* (1974). In the course of sharing his recollections of working with the pianist Solomon, Tertis recounts the private premiere of the sonata in Bliss's home on May 9, 1933, during which William Walton turned pages for Solomon. He also writes of a travel-weary Rubinstein showing up the morning of the recital and sight-reading the sonata in rehearsal, and later giving "an astounding performance, making light of the intricacies and technical difficulties of the piano part, and his interpretation musically was perfection."[10] Bliss's memoir provides helpful and first-hand background information concerning the creation and performance of many of his pieces, while also contextualizing the composer's life and artistic imperative. One unique feature of this memoir is its epistolary format. The full quotation of letters provides for much of the backbone of the account of Bliss's mature life. In specific reference to the viola sonata, Bliss shares several insightful stories, most notably his conviction that the "Viola Sonata should have Tertis' name coupled with mine as joint composers."[11]

Another pertinent primary source is a collection of his writings, *Bliss on Music: Selected Writings of Arthur Bliss, 1920–1975.* The book contains a vast array of writings, chronologically organized into seven sections, with a brief introduction for each. The majority of these writings are drawn from magazines, newspapers, and journals; other sources include program and liner notes, published interviews, lectures, and analyses of his own works. Particularly relevant to this study is the 35-page "Aspects of Contemporary Music," the script from a set of three lectures Bliss gave in March 1934. In

[10] Lionel Tertis, *My Viola and I* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1974), 77.
[11] Arthur Bliss, *As I Remember* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 102.

the third lecture, Bliss speaks about the compositional and creative process. He uses his Clarinet Quintet, which was performed following his remarks, as an example of the ideas he expressed. He had originally planned to use the Viola Sonata (to be performed by Tertis and Solomon) to illustrate his ideas, but he was forced to switch to the Clarinet Quintet at the last minute after Tertis injured his hand. However, his introductory remarks about the Viola Sonata for this lecture still remain in existence and are printed as Appendix B in this book. They offer little analysis about the sonata (only a single paragraph), instead of focusing on the history and role of the viola.

The first edition of the score, published by Oxford University Press in 1934, is the only published edition. Since the whereabouts of the holograph are unknown, this printed edition is the only primary source for the sonata. The viola part in this edition, edited by Tertis, includes his fingerings, bowings, and string suggestions.

As is the trend with other sources, viola specific literature contains only a few references to the sonata, mostly in conjunction with Tertis's involvement. Franz Zeyringer's *Literature für Viola* (1985), an excellent catalogue of viola music, includes the sonata among its lists, but in Maurice Riley's definitive two-volume *The History of the Viola* (1980 and 1991), Bliss's viola sonata only appears once, tucked into a list of works written for Tertis. Thomas Tatton, in his far-reaching thesis covering English viola music, writes of the sonata's "sinewy strength, power, and brilliance," and goes on to state that "it is a masterpiece in the viola repertoire."[12] Despite this "masterpiece" designation, Tatton only allots the sonata a single paragraph and two musical examples, although this is similar to the space given to sonatas by Bax, Bloch, and Clarke. Writing

[12] Thomas Tatton, "English Viola Music" (DMA Thesis, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, 1976), 100.

later in a brief article in the Summer 2015 edition of the *Journal of the American Viola Society*, Tatton included the sonata in a category of "works of artistic importance and of lasting value," along with sonatas by Bax, Clarke, and Vaughan Williams. In his 2006 biography *Lionel Tertis: The First Great Virtuoso of the Viola*, John White provides a clear summary of the genesis of the sonata and its initial reception; however, this section offers little new information or analysis about the sonata.

Several organizations exist for the furtherance of Bliss's legacy and to aid in research. The Arthur Bliss Archive, housed in the Cambridge University Library, contains manuscripts, printed editions, sound recordings, letters, concert programs, photographs, and other papers. Most of the contents of the collection were bequeathed by Bliss's wife, Trudy Bliss. The Bliss Trust, founded in 1986 by Lady Bliss, serves to promote Bliss's music and support young composers. The Trust provides a host of scholarships and awards for both the performance and scholarship of Bliss's works. Founded in 2003 and with a similar aim as the Bliss Trust, the Arthur Bliss Society organizes concerts and meetings, as well as publishing a twice-yearly newsletter.

CHAPTER 2. ARTHUR BLISS

The first chapter of this document provides an overview of the life and musical works of Arthur Bliss with specific attention to his chamber music compositions, works for string instruments, and his works written before the Viola Sonata, from roughly 1914 to 1933.

Arthur Edward Drummond Bliss was born on August 2, 1891, in Queen's Ride, Barnes, London. His father, Francis Edward Bliss (1847–1930), was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, and had come to London in 1888. Together with his English wife Agnes Kennard Bliss (née Davis; 1876–1895), the couple had two more sons before Agnes died in 1895 when Arthur was three and a half years old. Arthur's younger brothers were Francis Kennard (born September 1892, died September 1916) and Howard James (born June 1894, died 1977). All three sons were musicians: Arthur played piano, Kennard clarinet, and Howard cello. They often played together at home and were frequent performers on recital programs throughout their years in school. Kennard was killed near Thiepval in during the Battle of the Somme (World War I), a few miles from where Arthur had been stationed. Bliss was deeply affected by the loss of his brother. He recalls that Kennard "was the most gifted of us all, and to *me* his rebellious nature would have been a stimulant, his caustic comments a sharp corrective through those years when I was struggling on my own for musical expression."[13]

After three years of studying at the Bilton Grange preparatory school, Bliss entered Rugby School on September 28, 1905, at the age of 14. While Bliss's own recollection of his time there are scant, the years that he spent at the school (1905–1910)

[13] Bliss, *As I Remember*, 45.

were nevertheless full of musical milestones and development. From the stylistic side, he notes his "growing love for the music of Elgar" and his discovery of French music—specifically Debussy and Ravel—that shaped his musical tastes for the rest of his life: "my first affection for his [Ravel's] music has never wavered."[14] This affection manifests itself in his early chamber works and can be detected even in works written much later, like the viola sonata.

Of importance to this study, Bliss recounts that during his time at Rugby, he decided to learn a string instrument. He enrolled in viola lessons with Wilhelm Sachse, a German violinist. After Sachse learned of Bliss's aptitude on the piano, the lessons morphed into chamber music reading sessions, with Bliss playing works like the Brahms Violin Sonatas alongside Sachse. Recounting this experience in his autobiography, Bliss, in reference to his own viola sonata, writes that "years later, I learnt more about the viola by writing a large-scale work for Lionel Tertis than I should have done in a year's tuition from this performing teacher."[15]

Bliss then moved on to Pembroke College, Cambridge in 1910, earning a BA in history and a Bachelor of Music in 1913 before enrolling in the Royal Academy of Music where he studied for nearly a year before the outbreak of World War I in August 1914.[16]

Between 1914 and 1915, Bliss completed two chamber works—the String Quartet in A major, B10 (1914) and the Piano Quartet in A minor, B13 (1915)—that were

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[14] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 21–23.
[15] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 26.
[16] There is no certainty as to whether Bliss completed his degree in music. According to Sugden, Bliss "earned a First in Part I and [completed] the course two years later, but no record exists for the result in this second part" (Sugden, 21). Craggs in his *Bio-Bibliography* stated that he received a "Mus.Bac" in 1913. And the website for Pembroke College cites Bliss as earning a BA and MusB in 1913 (http://www.pem.cam.ac.uk/the-college/pembroke-past-and-present/music/).

performed during the war years. The string quartet received its public premiere on June 9, 1914, in Cambridge with Howard Bliss (the composer's brother) playing cello. The premiere of the piano quartet occurred on April 20, 1915, on the War Emergency Concert in Steinway Hall, London, with Tertis playing the viola part. While Bliss was serving in France, his father, assisted by composer and conductor Eugene Goossens, arranged for Novello to publish both works. After the war, Bliss withdrew the unsold copies and had the plates destroyed for both works; they survived, however, in manuscript, and Edition Peters released them in 2007.

Bliss enlisted on August 6, 1914, two days after the beginning of the war. His years in the war were punctuated by moments of valor, injury, personal loss, and music. Remarkably, Bliss continued and even deepened his connection with music during his years in the war. Despite the nightmare-ish conditions in the trenches on the Western Front, Bliss had access to a gramophone and recordings, including the slow movement of Debussy's Quartet, the second part of the *Meistersinger* Overture, and works by Elgar and Schubert.[17]

Bliss's years in the war indelibly affected the rest of his life. He writes in his autobiography that "these four years are so deeply etched on my mind that I cannot make a logical form of my life without depicting them."[18] In concert with the many sensitive artists plunged into military service, Bliss was acutely aware of the stark contrast of realities manifested by war. He recounts:

> I found in France, as so many others did, that the appreciation of a moment's beauty had been intensified by the sordid contrast around: one's senses were so much more sharply on the alert for sights and sounds that went unnoticed in peacetime because taken so for granted. But a butterfly alighting on a trench

[17] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 39.
[18] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 32.

> parapet, a thrush's songs at "stand to," a sudden rainbow, became infinitely precious phenomena, and indeed the sheer joy of being alive was more relished for there being the continual possibility of sudden death.[19]

Bliss's war memories troubled him for years following the conclusion of his service. Nightmares haunted him until at least 1929; exorcising these nightmares was, as he claims, the impetus for composing *Morning Heroes*, which he describes as a "symphony on war."[20] Christopher Palmer argues that this exorcism was unsuccessful, writing that his wartime experiences were responsible for the "unmistakable streak of violence which has broken out in sporadically in Bliss's music ever since" and the "constant stream of sad processions winding their way through his music."[21] The latter is particularly relevant to the second movement of the Viola Sonata.

After the war, Bliss returned to his studies at the Royal College of Music at the age of twenty-seven; his second stint there lasted from February 15, 1919 to July 1920. Shortly following an influential trip to Paris, four of his uniquely-scored chamber compositions had their premiere performances in the span of eleven months: *Madam Noy* (June 23, 1920), *Rhapsody* (October 6, 1920), *Conversations* (April 20, 1921), and *Rout* (May 4, 1921). These four works, which Bliss called "essays in the exploration of sound" helped establish him as an important emerging composer.[22] While many contemporary commentators found these works to be strongly avant-garde, they were nowhere near as boundary-pushing as contemporaneous works by composers like Stravinsky. They nevertheless secured Bliss a reputation as the leading *enfant terrible* of his time. Around

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[19] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 36.
[20] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 96.
[21] Christopher Palmer, "Aspects of Bliss," *The Musical Times* 112, no. 1542 (1971), 743.
[22] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 54.

the same time, a glowing review by London's most important music critic Ernest Newman of his music for *The Tempest* also added to Bliss's growing stature.[23]

In these burgeoning years of his musical career, the most undeniably important event was the commission and performances of his four-movement orchestral work, *A Colour Symphony.* Elgar asked Bliss, Herbert Howells, and Eugene Goossens to each write a piece for orchestra for the 1922 edition of Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester. *A Colour Symphony* remains Bliss's most popular and well-known works.

Bliss found external inspiration for this work in a book from a friend about heraldry. The external source of inspiration became a career-long trend that initiated many of Bliss's most important works. He admits as much in his autobiography: "I like the stimulus of words, or a theatrical setting, a colourful occasion or the collaboration of a great player."[24] The works written with specific performers in mind encompass many of his greatest compositions: the Viola Sonata for Tertis, the Violin Concerto for Alfredo Campoli, the Cello Concerto for Mstislav Rostropovich, the Piano Concerto for Solomon, the Oboe Quintet for Léon Goossens, the Clarinet Quintet for Edward Thurston, *Introduction and Allegro* for Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and *Hymn to Apollo* for Pierre Monteux and the Boston Symphony. With many of these, Bliss sought and found inspiration in the technique and musicality of the performers.

After a number of orchestral and large-scale compositions, the pendulum swung in the opposite direction in the early 1930s as Bliss produced his Clarinet Quintet (1932) and Viola Sonata (1933). Both works were written for virtuoso musicians—Frederick

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[23] "It is the most imaginative piece of theatre music that I have ever heard. Mr. Bliss is a young musician of a curiously lively, questing mind. . . . Altogether Mr. Bliss strikes one as a composer from whom something may be expected." Ernest Newman, as quoted by Bliss in *As I Remember*, 64.
[24] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 71.

Thurston and Tertis, respectively—and enjoyed initial critical successes.[25] More details about these works can be found later in this document.

In 1934, Bliss again explored new territory, this time writing music for "one of the most ambitious undertakings in British cinematic history," the film of H. G. Wells's *Things to Come*, directed by Alexander Korda.[26] Wells, after attending one of Bliss's three lectures at the Royal Institution in 1934 entitled "Aspects of Contemporary Music," recruited the composer to compose music for the film. Bliss went on to write music for seven films between 1934 and 1957 and made stand-alone suites for orchestra from two of them.

As Stewart Craggs notes, the majority of Bliss's music written after 1935 was the result of a commission or request. In a comment that is particularly relevant to the Viola Sonata, Craggs cites Bliss's commentary from a program note:

> I have great difficulty in starting a work unless stirred by some dramatic intention. . . . It has therefore been fortunate for me that most of my works have been demanded for definite occasions. The thought of a particular player or a group of singers . . . has been sufficient to set me writing.[27]

Bliss's next major work was a piano concerto for Solomon—who had premiered the Viola Sonata with Tertis—which was first performed on June 10, 1939, in Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic with Adrian Boult conducting. Bliss and his family attended the performance and subsequently toured the US. Their plans to return to England were halted by the outbreak of the Second World War on September 3, 1939.

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[25] See George Dannatt's "Introduction," 15, and especially Eric Bloom's "The Clarinet Quintet of Arthur Bliss," in which he writes "…I cannot think of a modern piece of chamber music that so completely enchanted me and convinced me of its lasting worth than the Quintet by Arthur Bliss" (424).
[26] Gregory Roscow in *Bliss on Music*, by Arthur Bliss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69.
[27] Stewart R. Craggs, *Arthur Bliss: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 7.

They eventually traveled to California where Bliss was offered and accepted an appointment as Visiting Professor of Music at the University of California, Berkeley, teaching there from January 1940 to May 1941. His compositional activities significantly decreased during this time, recalling that he "was too disturbed in mind to write any music during these months."[28] He did, however, produce a String Quartet in B-flat (which has been labeled as "String Quartet no. 1," despite his previous two string quartets) which captures his unsettled mood during this time. The Pro Arte Quartet premiered the work in Berkeley on April 9, 1941.

Bliss composed his final work of string chamber music, the String Quartet in F (the fourth that he wrote, but commonly referred to as String Quartet no. 2) for the Griller Quartet's twentieth anniversary in 1950. Bliss's friend and biographer George Dannatt claims that Bliss "considered this to be his best chamber music work."[29] During the same month—June 1950—that he completed the String Quartet, Bliss was knighted, and three years later, succeeded Arnold Bax as the Master of the Queen's Music, a post that he held until his death.[30]

While the quartet was his last work of chamber music for strings, Bliss composed two more significant works featuring string instruments: the Violin Concerto (1955) and the Cello Concerto (1970). As with the Viola Sonata, both concerti were written for virtuoso performers, Alfredo Campoli and Mstislav Rostropovich, respectively. In another similarity with the Viola Sonata, Bliss welcomed compositional collaboration

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[28] Bliss, *As I Remember*, 130.
[29] George Dannatt, Introduction to *Arthur Bliss: Catalogue of the Complete Works*, by Lewis Foreman (Kent, England: Novello, 1980), 19.
[30] As noted above, Bliss enjoyed the task of composing occasional and ceremonial music. The sound of marches and processions threads through many of his abstract compositions, including the viola sonata.

from the performer when he was writing the Violin Concerto. The collaboration between composer and performer was a thread that ran through Bliss's entire life, from his earliest juvenilia written for his brothers to late-career works like the Cello Concerto (1970) and solo piano work *Triptych* (1971) for the Hungarian pianist Louis Kentner.

Bliss's final large-scale compositions included his most extensive orchestral work, *Metamorphic Variations* (1972) and *Shield of Faith* (1974), a choral work for the quincentenary of St. George's Chapel in Windsor. Bliss died on March 27, 1975, at the age of eighty-three.

CHAPTER 3. BLISS'S CHAMBER MUSIC

This chapter provides an overview of Bliss's chamber music, with a specific focus on two early works for strings that have received little scholarly attention. I examine these works to highlight Bliss's writing for the viola in a chamber music context and to draw connections to the Viola Sonata. This analysis also draws out the general stylistic elements of Bliss's early writing.

Bliss received the greatest renown for his large-scale works, most notably *A Colour Symphony* (1921), *Morning Heroes* (1930), and *Metamorphic Variations* (1972). Yet, although chamber music comprises a smaller portion of his oeuvre, it nevertheless appears as a consistent thread that comes to the fore at occasional and repeated points throughout his compositional career. While a full study and analysis of Bliss's chamber music works is beyond the scope of this document, looking closer at this body of work—specifically, the works involving stringed instruments—will provide a valuable foundation and reference point for considering the Viola Sonata.

Like many composers, Bliss's early essays into composition were chamber works. In fact, his first composition to receive a public performance was a chamber work, one which the composer deemed "somewhat unusual" in his autobiography: the 1904 Quartet for piano, clarinet, cello, and timpani.[31] He wrote the piece so that he, his brother Kennard, and two friends could perform it, which they did in the house of his music teacher Basil Johnson in 1905. From this "unusual" beginning flowered at least nineteen original chamber works featuring strings (see table 3.1).

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[31] Bliss, *As I Remember*, 20.

Table 3.1. Bliss's chamber music with strings. Italicized works are either arrangements, lost, or unpublished.

Date	**Title**	**Instrumentation**
1904	Quartet for Piano, Clarinet, Cello, and Timpani	Piano, clarinet, cello, timpani
1907	*March and Valse des Fleurs: Tchaikovsky*	*Clarinet and cello (arrangement)*
1914	Quartet [No. 1] for Strings	Two violins, viola, cello
1914	Sonata for Violin and Piano	Violin, piano
1915	Quartet for Piano and Strings	Piano, violin, viola, cello
1916	*Fugue for String Quartet*	*Two violins, viola, cello (lost)*
1918	Madam Noy	Soprano, flute, clarinet, bassoon, harp, viola, doublebass
1919	*Quintet for Piano and Strings*	*Piano, two violins, viola, cello (lost)*
1919	Rhapsody	Mezzo-soprano, tenor, flute, cor anglais, two violins, viola, cello, double-bass
1920	Conversations	Flute (and bass flute), oboe (and cor anglais), violin, viola, violoncello
1920	Rout	Soprano, flute, clarinet, glockenspiel, side drum, harp, two violins, viola, cello, double-bass
1924	*Quartet [No. 2] for Strings*	*Two violins, viola, cello (unpublished)*
1927	Four Songs	Voice, violin, piano
1927	Quintet for Oboe and Strings	Oboe, two violins, viola, cello
1932	Quintet for Clarinet and Strings	Clarinet, two violins, viola, cello
1933	Sonata for Viola and Piano	Viola, piano
1941	Quartet [No. 3] for Strings	Two violins, viola, cello
1950	Quartet [No. 4] for Strings	Two violins, viola, cello
1954	Elegiac Sonnet	Tenor, two violins, viola, cello, piano

A survey of Bliss's chamber works clearly reveals the two poles of his musical personality frequently identified by critics: the coloristically-experimental *enfante terrible* and the English Romantic traditionalist. Bliss's works from the early portion of his career (1914–1921) embody both of these poles, and selections from each camp have their own particular resonances with the Viola Sonata. These works can be divided into

two groups: those from roughly before Bliss's service in World War I—the String Quartet [no. 1] in A major (1914) and the Piano Quartet in A minor (1915)—and those after his demobilization—*Madam Noy* (1918)*, Rhapsody* (1919)*, Conversations* (1920)*,* and *Rout* (1920). Both groups of works display the influence of French music. The earlier works are indebted to sound worlds of Debussy and, especially, Ravel. Of the latter composer, Bliss wrote: "I loved [. . .] the cool, elegant music of Ravel—no beetling brows and gloomy looks here, but a keen and slightly quizzical look at the world [. . .]. My first affection of his music has never wavered."[32] The second group of works bears a closer affinity to works by the younger *Les Six* composers and Stravinsky.[33] While a clear-cut division of these two groups into traditionalist versus avant-garde is neither helpful nor accurate, the earlier works engage in more traditional approaches—especially in their instrumentation—and the later works show more signs of experimentation.

As noted earlier, Bliss's String Quartet [no. 1] and Piano Quartet were published by Novello with the sponsorship of the Bliss's father during the war. Bliss subsequently withdrew the works upon his return to England. There is scant documentary evidence for the decision, but it is easy to guess why. The two works present a sunny, joyous, and un-encumbered musical world, full of piquant melodies and lightly-flowing slow movements. For a composer returning home in 1918 from multiple months-long stints on the front lines in the trenches, as one who suffered a gas attack, and whose brother had been killed in battle, this decision was undoubtedly influenced by the horrors of war he experienced and can be viewed as a renunciation of youthful naïveté. Fortunately, both works have survived and were reprinted by Edition Peters in 2007.

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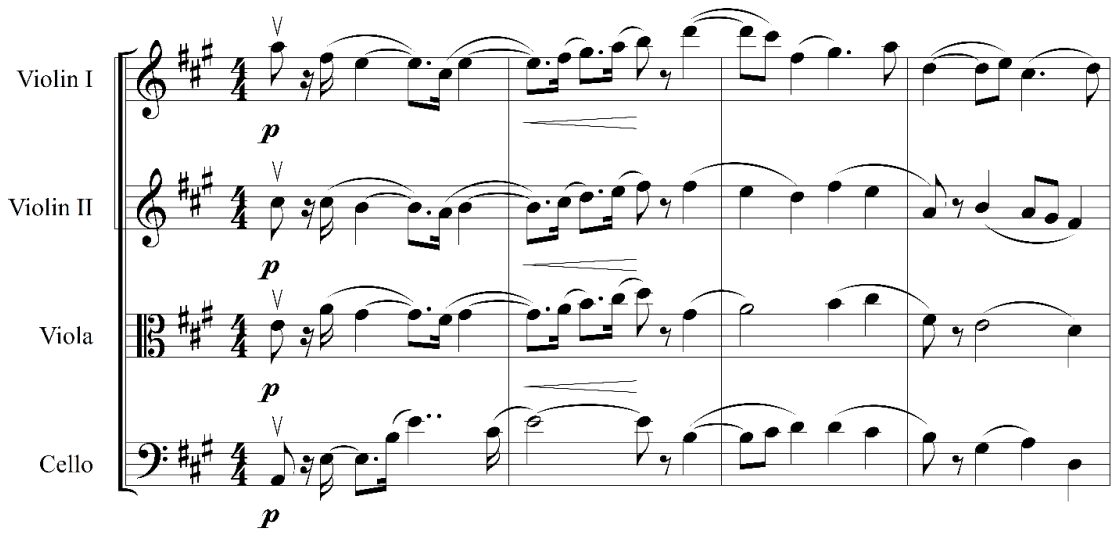
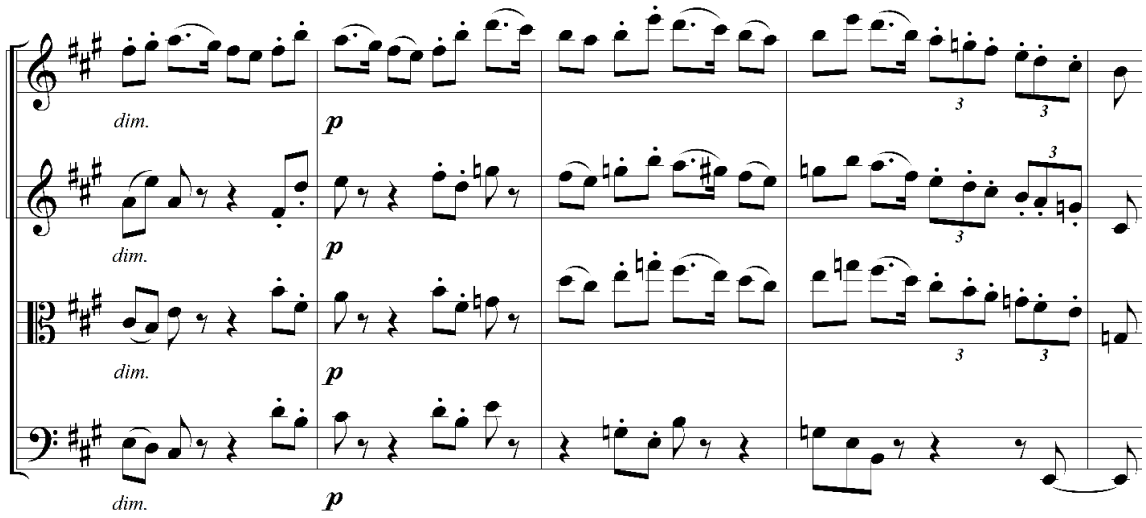
[32] Bliss, *As I Remember*, 21.
[33] Christopher Palmer, *Bliss* (Kent: Novello, 1976), 6.



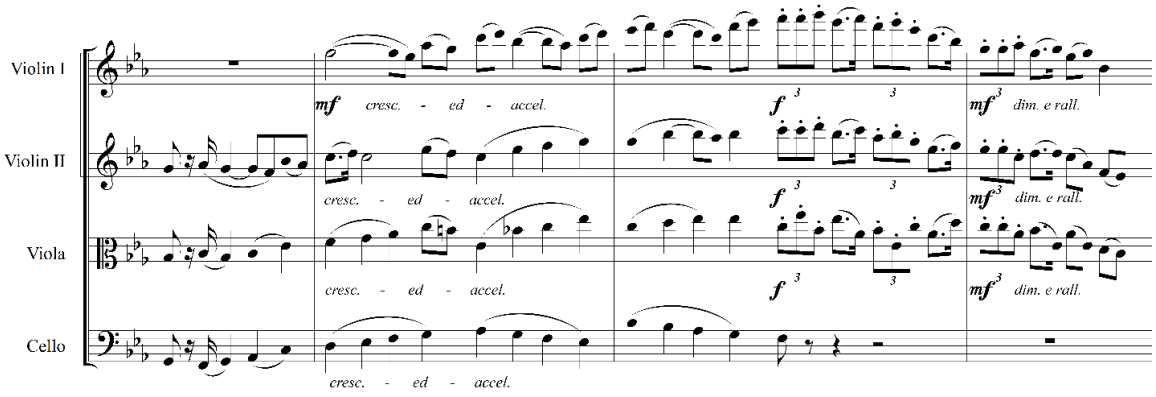
Example 3.1. Arthur Bliss, String Quartet [no. 1] (1914), mvt I, mm. 1–4.

The three-movement string quartet features a central slow movement surrounded by two upbeat outer movements. The first movement, *moderato ma tranquillo,* presents a fairly straightforward sonata form (A B A` coda), with two themes in the opening A section and a rather rigidly-divided development section. The exposition and recapitulation have almost exactly the same proportions and each thematic area is separated by a four or five measure link. The movement opens with a halting theme in A major that, despite the first note being on the downbeat of the first measure, sounds as if it begins with an anacrusis (ex. 3.1). Bliss develops the theme rather quickly; by the movement's fourth phrase, the theme compresses into three-beat groupings punctuated by three concluding eighth notes that create an air of upright propriety (ex. 3.2). A general upward thrust of melodic lines give the work a positive mood, and the lack of hard-edged cadences and chords give the opening sections a horizontally flowing lyricism (ex. 3.3)

Alternations between triplet eights and dotted eighth and sixteenth figures provide just enough rhythmic variety to keep the opening section from remaining entirely stagnant. Echoes of this melodic horizontality can be heard in the opening theme in the first movement of the Viola Sonata.



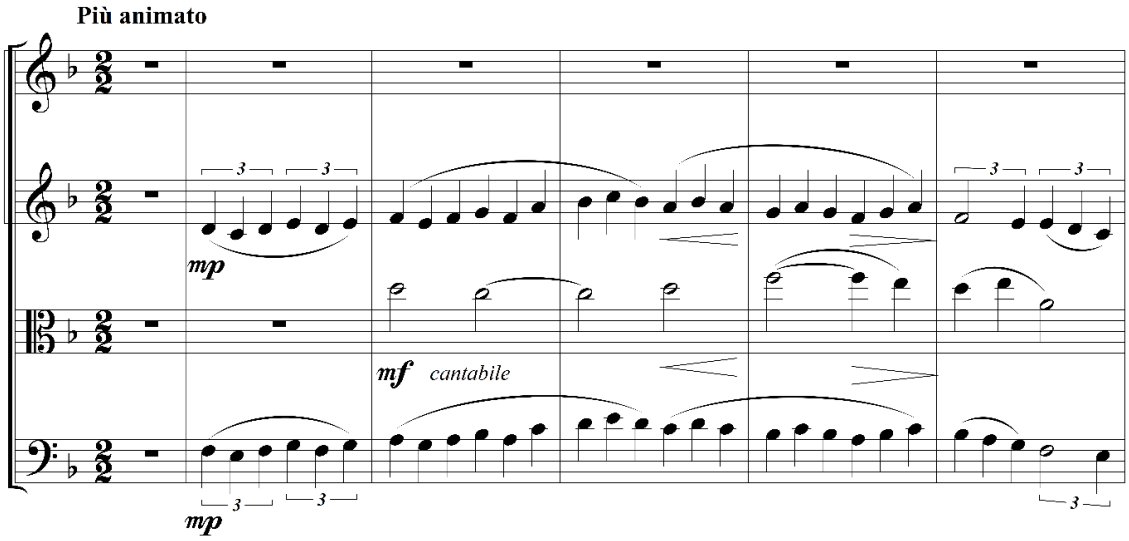
Example 3.2, Arthur Bliss, String Quartet [no. 1] (1914), mvt I, mm. 16–20.



Example 3.3, Arthur Bliss, String Quartet [no. 1] (1914), mvt I, mm. 28–34.

The second theme (*piu animato,* 2/2 meter), with its half-note melodies and flowing triplets underneath, could easily be confused for music by Vaughan Williams (ex. 3.4). This D-natural-minor theme also exhibits the anacrusis quality found in the first

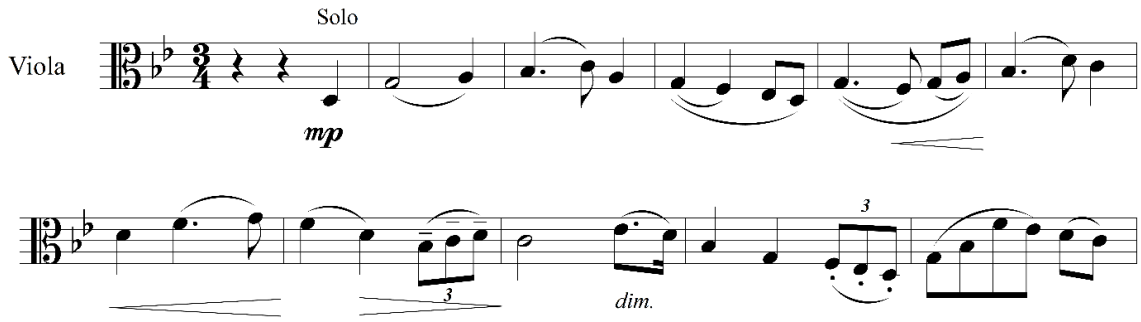
theme, created by two metrical devices. The melody itself begins on the downbeat of m. 41 with the viola's half note followed by two tied half notes. The "short-long" rhythmic quality creates a feeling of the first note leading into the next, similar to that of an anacrusis. Bliss previews this anacrusis feeling by beginning the accompanying triplets in the cello and second violin (m. 40) one measure before the viola's melody, creating a pickup measure. The first movement of the Viola Sonata notably begins with a pickup measure in the piano before the viola's melodic entrance (see example 5.22).



Example 3.4. Arthur Bliss, String Quartet [no. 1] (1914), mvt I, mm. 39–44.

Harmonically, the movement begins and ends in A major, but wanders through a variety of key centers, with notable stops in modally altered (mostly flattened) keys: D minor, F major and minor, C major, G minor, and F-sharp minor. Even at this gestational stage, we can see both Bliss's commitment to tonal centers and his easy willingness to

explore multiple keys within one movement. Generally speaking, this movement owes a lot of its harmonic and textural relationships to Ravel's String Quartet (1903).

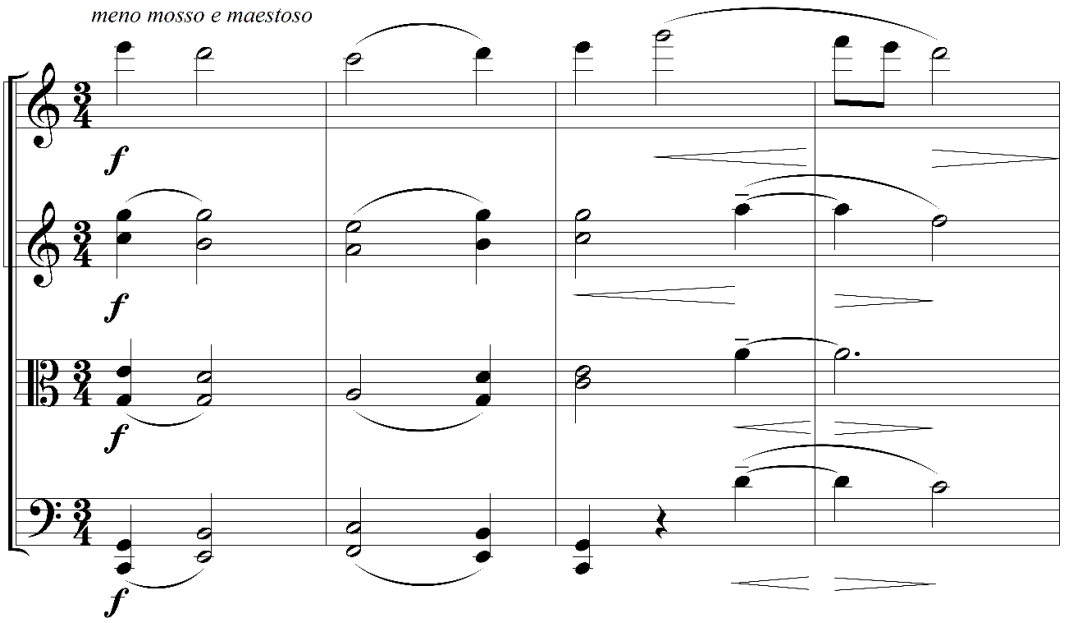


Example 3.5. Arthur Bliss, String Quartet [no. 1] (1914), mvt II, mm.1–11. Viola solo line.

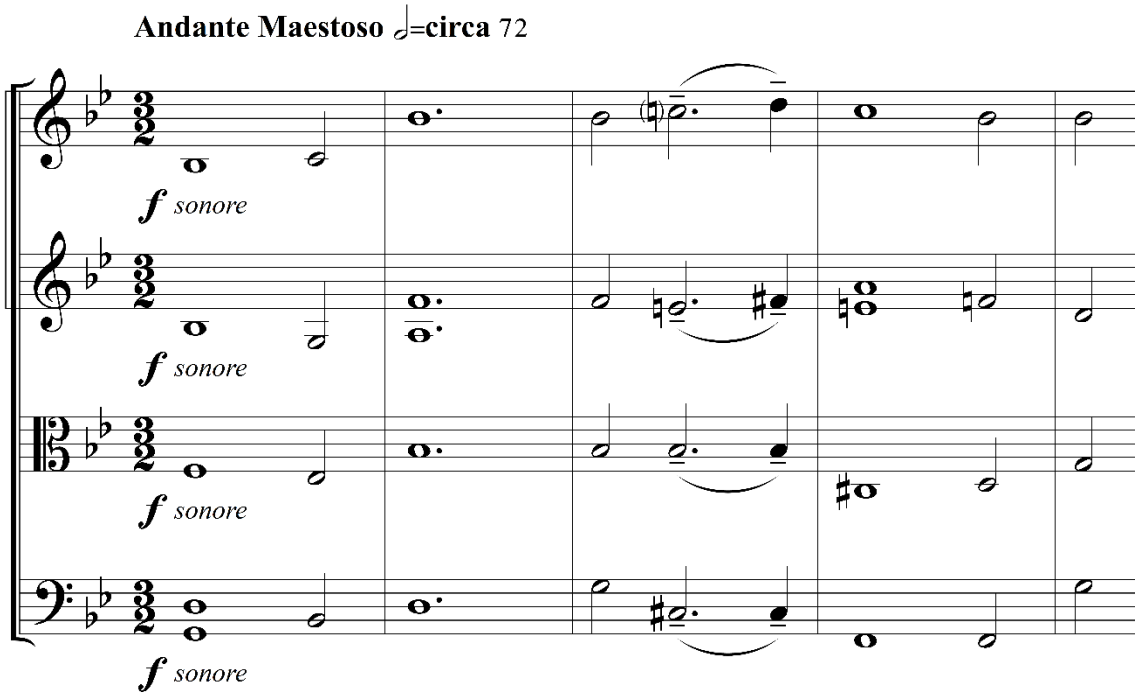
The second movement, Andante sostenuto, opens with a nine-measure unaccompanied viola solo comprised of two four-measure phrases and a single measure "coda" (ex. 3.5). Centered in the viola's mid to lowest register, this meandering melody shifts from G natural-minor in the first phrase, to B-flat major in the second before settling again in G minor at its conclusion. Bliss retains the anacrusis feeling in this movement. But, unlike the disguised anacrusis in the first movement, the pickup note here is made explicit, beginning on the third beat of the first measure with a distinctive ascending perfect fourth from scale degree 5 to scale degree 1. With the second violin's quasi-fugal entrance in the twelfth measure, the movement's horizontal and linear focus becomes clear. Similar to the first movement, horizontal melodic motion takes priority over vertical clarity.

Bliss introduces a second thematic section—Alla minuetto, *grazioso* (m. 59)—that features more energetic music, enlivened by trills and dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note figures. The original melody later returns with accompanying scherzando-style

staccato sixteenths, which gradually fade into more lugubrious eights. Elements of the second theme precede an eighteen-measure coda, rounding out a loosely constructed A B A B coda form. In the final cadence in the tonic key of G minor, echoes of Ravel's style can be strongly heard. Bliss's minor five triad (D–F–A) that resolves to a minor tonic (G–B-flat–D) in mm. 180–81 bears an almost exact resemblance in harmony and voicing to the concluding cadence in the "Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant" movement from Ravel's ballet *Ma mère l'Oye* (1911; premiered in 1912). The final harmonic motion of the movement, an E-flat major triad to a G major triad (VI – I), makes for a weak and inconclusive ending. A comparable—though more harmonically complex—gesture occurs in the similarly open-ended conclusion of the Viola Sonata's second movement. In that movement, the harmony passes from an F-sharp minor chord to a B-flat major chord, mirroring the major third root movement and the hazy ending of the String Quartet. Overall, this movement lacks much of the formal rigor and logic of the first movement, defined more by discursive ramblings rather than chiseled structure.

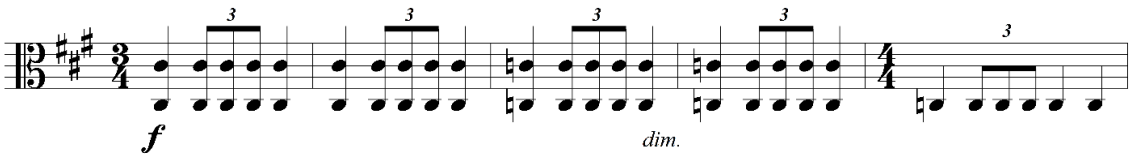


Example 3.6. Arthur Bliss, String Quartet [no. 1] (1914), mvt III, mm.76–81. Choral harmony interrupts in m. 78.

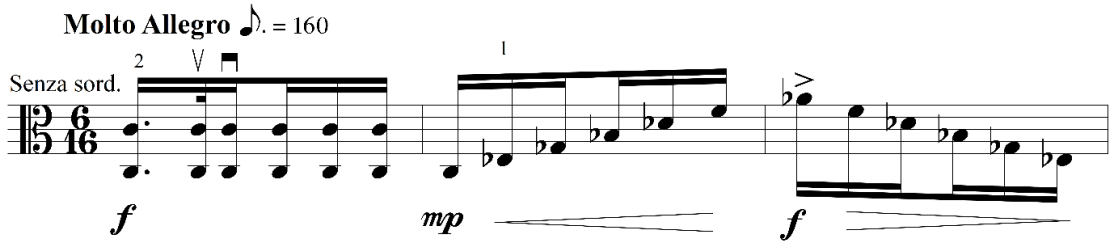


Example 3.7. Arthur Bliss, String Quartet [no. 3] (1941), mvt I, mm.1–4. Choral harmony reminiscent of the music in example 3.6.

Whereas the first movement displays an impressive amount of structural coherence and motivic development from the young composer, the third and final movement suffers from an overabundance of thematic material that lacks the space for development and growth. With an almost schizophrenic parade of embryonic themes truncated by frequent multiple-measure rallentandos (five occur between mm. 38–101), the movement fails to take flight in comparison to the flowing and effusive first movement. Yet, this movement is not without its remarkable features. Bliss displays rhythmic inventiveness not seen in other parts of the quartet, including frequent hemiolas (for example, mm. 45–50) and alternations of meter that show metrical flexibility—all within a controlled context—previously unseen in the young composer's works. With an eye towards Bliss's future works, interjectory chorale-like chordal passages (mm. 78–81 (ex. 3.6) and mm. 235–38) foreshadow the broad and expansive opening of the String Quartet no. 3 (1941) (ex. 3.7). Another notable feature is the triplet repeated C's in the viola's lowest register (ex. 3.8), a sonority and rhythm that Bliss reuses in the third movement of the Viola Sonata (ex. 3.9).

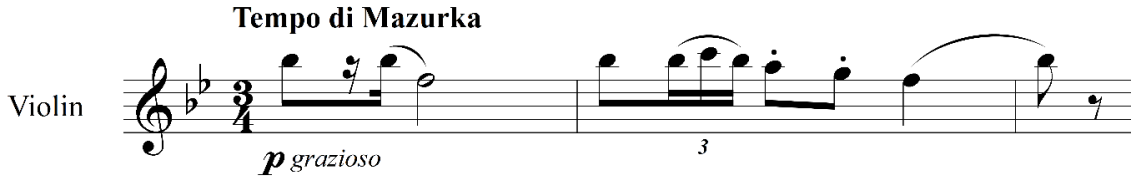


Example 3.8. Arthur Bliss, String Quartet [no. 1] (1914), mvt III, mm.70–74.



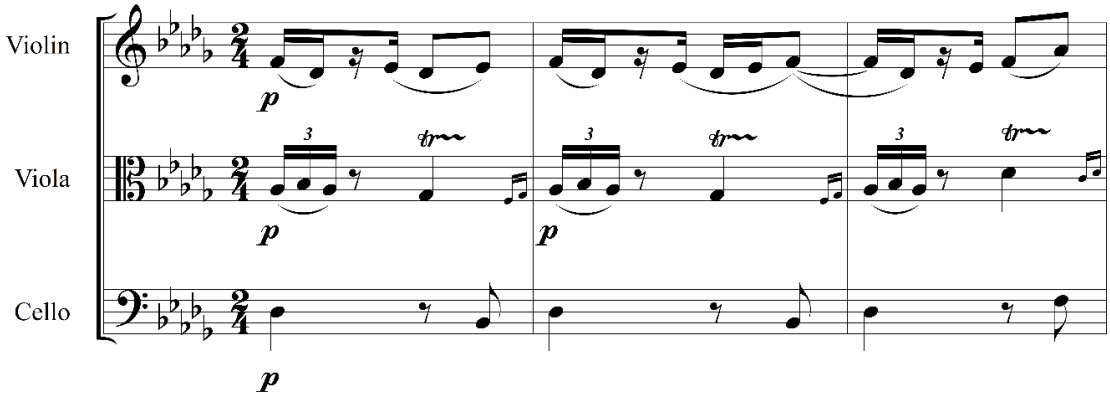
Example 3.9. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 1–3. Similar tone color and figuration to the music in example 3.8.

Bliss's Piano Quartet in A minor (1915) makes for a perfect companion to his String Quartet [no. 1] as both works contain extensive similarities. In fact, many of these similarities can be more aptly identified as self-quotation. The clearest example of this can be found between the beginning of the second movement of the piano quartet to string quartet's opening theme. Both works have a halting beginning that features the exact same rhythm and gesture (ex. 3.10). The third theme in the first movement of the Piano Quartet also shares the general rhythmic structure and, more importantly, the playful character, of the two opening themes (ex. 3.11, mm. 49–59). This type of self-borrowing is frequent throughout Bliss's oeuvre, including notable instances between the Clarinet Quintet and the Viola Sonata.



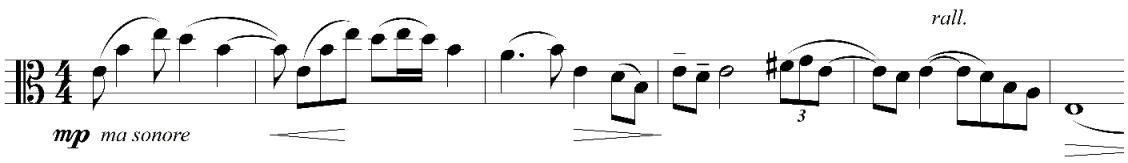
Example 3.10a. Piano Quartet, mvt II, mm. 1–2, violin. Compare to example 10b below.

Example 3.10b, String Quartet [no. 1], mvt. I, mm. 1–2, first violin.



Example 3.11. Arthur Bliss, Piano Quartet, mvt. I, mm. 49–51.

Though not as exact, another form of self-quotation can be found when comparing the initial prologue-like melody of the first movement of the Piano Quartet (ex. 3.12) to the opening melody in the String Quartet's second movement. Both feature the solo viola without accompaniment, both unambiguously reside in the natural minor mode (G minor for the String Quartet, E minor for the Piano Quartet), and both begin with a pickup gesture. That Bliss chose to open two of the six movements of his early string chamber music with a melody for solo viola—and that none of the other movements have extensive solos for other instruments—suggests his particular affinity for the instrument.



Example 3.12. Arthur Bliss, Piano Quartet, mvt. I, mm. 1–6. The viola's unaccompanied opening melody.

Even more so than the String Quartet [no. 1], the Piano Quartet is heavily indebted to Ravel and Debussy. In fact, one passage in the first movement almost exactly recreates a moment from Ravel's String Quartet. Bliss writes a transitional melody used in two places in the movement (mm. 80–84 and mm. 231–235) whose first five notes match exactly the rhythm and intervals of the opening melody of Ravel's first movement.

From a general perspective, both works show a freedom and variety of key areas, frequent usage of natural minor tonality, contain a vast trove of thematic material that is developed to varying degrees, and show deep influence of Debussy and Ravel. All of these qualities are also present in the Viola Sonata, and a thorough study of these two early works pays great dividends towards understanding Bliss's essential stylistic components.

CHAPTER 4. LIONEL TERTIS AND BLISS'S EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

While no artist creates their art entirely in a vacuum devoid of outside influence, Bliss, in particular, embraced extra-musical influence to spur his creativity. He was the first to acknowledge the importance of external and circumstantial motivation:

> I have always found it easier to write "dramatic" music than "pure" music. I like the stimulus of words, or a theatrical setting, a colourful occasion, or the collaboration of a great player. There is only a little of the spider about me, spinning his own web from his inner being. I am more of a magpie type. I need what Henry James termed a "trouvaille" or a "donnée."[34]

Christopher Palmer notes that "much of Bliss's most memorable music has been provoked by some extra-musical stimulus—literature, the stage or the virtuosity of a performer."[35] Additionally, Bliss wrote of the balance that he needed when writing "programmatic" versus "pure" music. When recounting his extensive undertaking of writing the music for the film *Things to Come,* Bliss wrote, in reference to his *Music for Strings,* that "in spite of the interest in the new medium of the films I got weary of only writing music that illustrated other people's ideas, and as an antidote I started to compose a substantial piece of "pure" music."[36] This extra-musical inspiration came from both practical circumstances, including commissions, incidental and occasional music, and dedications to virtuoso performers; and influences from other art forms, including literature, visual art, and films.

Of the latter category, Bliss possessed a great love and affinity for visual art, especially painting. He wrote that "visits to the studios of painters act as a greater

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[34] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 71.
[35] Christopher Palmer, "Aspects of Bliss," *The Musical Times* 112, no. 1542 (1971), 743.
[36] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 107.

incentive to work than any amount of talk with my fellow musicians. In looking at the struggle for realised form in a sculptor's or painter's work I find something that instructs me in my own art."[37] He was close friends with the English artist and designer Claud Lovat Fraser (1890–1921). The two collaborated on a 1919 production of *As You Like It* for which Fraser designed scenery and costumes and Bliss wrote the incidental music. After Fraser's untimely death, Bliss dedicated his 1921 orchestral work *Mêlée Fantasque* to the painter. Writing in 1923, Edwin Evans drew a direct line between each artist's use of color:

> In his own stage-work [Fraser] planned that colour should stand out from colour with an incisiveness that eliminated all compromise or subterfuge, and no effect of his was ever blurred at the edges. Arthur Bliss pursues the same ideals in sound and design as did Lovat Fraser in colour and design.[38]

Bliss's close friend and biographer George Dannatt recounts Bliss's delight in Picasso and Braque's works, and writes that Bliss "liked to watch painters at work."[39] Dannatt, who was also a painter and art collector, provided the inspiration for Bliss's *Metamorphic Variations* (1973) with his series of paintings *Tantris*, a set of abstract variations.[40]

Bliss chose to highlight his literary influences in the concluding chapter of his autobiography. He cites Dostoyevsky's works as coinciding most closely with his own feelings about himself: "Part of my being feels emotionally very much at home in

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[37] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 108.
[38] Edwin Evans, "Arthur Bliss," *The Musical Times* 64, no 960 (1923), 97.
[39] George Dannatt, Introduction to *Arthur Bliss: Catalogue of the Complete Works*, by Lewis Foreman (Kent, England: Novello, 1980), 30.
[40] Bliss chose to end *As I Remember* in 1966, but he lived for another nine years and continued to compose. The 1989 edition includes three additional chapters covering these years, one written by the composer's wife Trudy Bliss, and the others by Bliss scholar Andrew Burn. In his chapter "Bliss's music: 1966–75," Burn quotes a letter from January 8, 1973 in which Bliss describes the origin of the *Metamorphic Variations*: "Yes,—the original idea of Variation form for *my* new commissioned work *did* come from studying *your* [Dannatt's] visual variations "Tantris."' (Italics from the original). Bliss, *As I Remember*, 295.

Dostoevsky's world of luridly lit shadows, or rather has been revealed to me by him."[41] He also cites Anton Chekhov and Goethe as influences, and highlights Henry James's writings as achieving "the architectural grandeur of great symphonies."[42]

The inspiration for perhaps his most well-known work came from a chance encounter with a book. As Bliss wrote in the liner notes to a recording of the work, the idea behind the *Colour Symphony* "resulted from my accidentally coming across a book on heraldry in which I read of the symbolical meaning associated with various colours."[43] He recounts in his autobiography that

> for weeks I sat before a blank sheet of manuscript paper trying to make up my mind what shape, what character this new big work should have. And then one day, looking over a friend's library, I picked up a book on heraldry and started reading about the symbolic meanings associated with the primary colors. At once I saw the possibility of so characterising the four movements of a symphony.[44]

In addition to these instances of artistic cross-pollination, Bliss also received significant motivation from more practical circumstances. For the final twenty-two years of his life (1953–1975), Bliss served as the Master of the Queen's Music, a post that demanded the production of occasion-specific music for various ceremonies and events. While this music exists in a separate but parallel vein from his concert works, his work in this realm nevertheless attests to his impressive ability to compose cogent works based on externally-defined limitations.

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[41] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 244.
[42] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 225–226.
[43] Arthur Bliss, "A Colour Symphony," in *Bliss on Music*, ed. Gregory Roscow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 227.
[44] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 71.

While his position as Master of the Queen's Music was confined to the latter portion of his life, writing music inspired by and dedicated to virtuoso performers was a trend that threaded throughout his entire compositional career. Beginning with his earliest compositions for himself and his brothers and stretching through to his Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra (1970) for Mstislav Rostropovich, some of Bliss's most significant works were written for specific performers. For a complete listing of works written for specific performers, see Table 3.1.

Table 4.1. Bliss's compositions written for specific performers.

Date	**Title**	**Performer**
1926	Introduction and Allegro	Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra
1926	Hymn to Apollo	Pierre Monteux and the Boston Symphony Orchestra[45]
1927	Quintet for Oboe and Strings	Léon Goossens
1931–32	Quintet for Clarinet and Strings	Frederick Thurston
1933	Sonata for Viola and Piano	Lionel Tertis
1938–39	Concerto for Piano and Orchestra	Solomon
1951	*The Enchantress*	Kathleen Ferrier
1952	Sonata for Piano	Noel Mewton-Wood
1953–54	Concerto for Violin and Orchestra	Alfredo Campoli
1969–70	Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra	Mstislav Rostropovich
1971	*Triptych*	Louis Kentner

[45] *Hymn to Apollo* was premiered by Pierre Monteux and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and officially dedicated to Fritz Reiner and the Cincinnati Orchestra. According to Bliss, the work was composed as a "thank you" for Monteux's performance of *A Colour Symphony* in Boston and New York in 1923. See Roscow, 263.

In three of these works, Bliss's proximity and sensitivity towards the performers produced indelible marks on the compositions themselves. When writing the Piano Concerto (1938–39), Bliss shared a "close and stimulating collaboration" with Solomon, the pianist for whom it was written.[46] Bliss shaped the work around Solomon's abilities, writing that it was "designed for a virtuoso and makes great demands on the player's technique. . . . Besides being a master pianist Solomon has the temperament I admire—capable of great feeling, held steady in check, I try to do the same by casting my work into as formal a pattern as I can." [47] Bliss engaged in a similar collaboration with Alfredo Campoli, particularly noting the musical and technical suggestions provided by the violinist. Bliss recounted that he was "swayed by the style of playing of my chosen soloist" who had been "tireless in discussing the work—almost bar by bar—in suggesting how difficult and awkward passages can be made more amenable."[48] The following passage from his autobiography clearly illustrates this relationship:

> I learnt a lot about violin technique from him. As each section of the concerto was sketched I would take it to his house, and we would play through it together. If a passage seemed to him ineffective, he would exaggerate its difficulty, distorting his face in anguish. He would suggest an alteration, and play it through again, murmuring "beautiful, beautiful"! I was always amused by this play-acting, but the result of his persuasive cajoling was that, whether the concerto be liked or not, it certainly is apt for the instrument.[49]

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[46] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 120.
[47] Bliss, quoted in Bryan Crimp, "The Piano Concerto in B Flat (1939)," in *Arthur Bliss: Music and Literature*, ed. Stewart R. Craggs (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002), 114.
[48] Arthur Bliss, "Concerto for Violin and Orchestra" in *Bliss on Music*, ed. Gregory Roscow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 222.
[49] Bliss, As I Remember, 194.

While Bliss's collaborations with Solomon and Campoli were detailed and productive, he found his closest collaboration with a performer while writing the Sonata for Viola and Piano.

4.1 Lionel Tertis and Bliss's Sonata for Viola and Piano

Lionel Tertis (1876–1975) was no stranger to collaborations with composers. As one of the first major proponents of the viola as a solo instrument, Tertis commissioned or was the dedicatee of at least 63 works featuring the viola, and transcribed or arranged many more.[50] In addition to Bliss's monumental sonata written for him, Arnold Bax, York Bowen, Frank Bridge, Benjamin Dale, William Walton, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and William Walton wrote significant works for him. These works, as well as Tertis's many transcriptions, arrangements, and original compositions for viola, formed a substantial body of repertoire that furthered Tertis's pioneering quest of highlighting the soloistic capabilities of the viola.

Before exploring the background of the Bliss's Sonata as it relates to Tertis, it is worthwhile to note several fascinating viola-related connections between Bliss, Tertis, and William Walton (1902–1983). Walton composed one of the great concertos for the viola in 1929, a work that has since become standard repertoire for all violists. In addition to Sir Thomas Beecham's oft-cited suggestion[51] that Walton compose a concerto for Tertis, the English violist Bernard Shore[52] alternately suggests that the genesis of the

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[50] John White, *Lionel Tertis* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), Appendix 6, loc. 7737–8099 of 9992, Kindle.

[51] See Howes, *The Music of William Walton* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 80.

[52] Bernard Shore was violist and teacher. He was Tertis's student, served as the principal violist of the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 1930–43, and later music inspector at the Ministry of Education. See Tertis, *My Viola and I,* 139; John White, *An Anthology of British Viola Players* (Colne: Comus Edition, 1997), 199.

concerto came from the composer hearing Tertis perform Bach's Chaconne in recital in 1929.[53] Coincidently, Bliss's first impression of Tertis also came from hearing him perform the Chaconne. Bliss writes, "I went specially to hear his own arrangement of the Bach Chaconne, and of course his tone was absolutely personal, like Goossens' tone on the oboe is personal to him. [. . .] It was a really thrilling sound."[54]

A second intersection between Tertis, Bliss, and Walton occurred during the private premiere of Bliss's sonata at Bliss's house in Hampstead Heath, London. For the performance on May 9, 1933 in front of "a very distinguished gathering of musicians," Tertis and Solomon played the Sonata with none other than Walton turning Solomon's pages.[55]

Much to his own regret, Tertis, the dedicatee of Walton's concerto, chose not to perform its premiere. He later wrote that

> With shame and contrition I admit that when the composer offered me the first performance I declined it. I was unwell at the time; but what is also true is that I had not learnt to appreciate Walton's style. The innovations in his musical language, which now seem so logical and so truly in the main-stream of music, then struck me as far-fetched.[56]

In later years, Tertis cited a specific instance of Walton's musical style that fell beyond his musical reckoning: "When I received the concerto from the composer I wasn't accustomed to play F natural when the octave above was F sharp."[57] Whatever misgivings Tertis once had disappeared by 1933, as exactly the same instance—"F-

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[53] White, *Lionel Tertis,* ch. 7, loc. 2410.
[54] White, *Lionel Tertis,* ch. 8, loc. 2859.
[55] Tertis, *My Viola and I* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1974), 74.
[56] Tertis, *My Viola and I,* 36.
[57] White, *Lionel Tertis,* ch. 7, loc 2398.

natural when the octave above was F-sharp"—occurs in the first two measures of Bliss's sonata (see ex. 5.22 in chapter 5).

4.2 Lionel Tertis, Arthur Bliss, and Early Performances of the Sonata

Before their convergence due to the Viola Sonata, Bliss and Tertis intersected at several points throughout their careers. Tertis (b. 1876) was fourteen years older than Bliss (b. 1891), though both men died within nearly a month of each other in 1975. The first obvious starting point for finding a connection between the two is through the affiliations with the Royal College of Music. However, they narrowly missed each other at that institution. After completing his studies there, Tertis became sub-professor at the Academy in 1899 and was later elected as the Academy's first viola Professor in October 1900. He taught there until December 1909, when he resigned to focus his career on performing. Bliss's two stints at the Academy—1913–14 and 1919–20—fell just in between Tertis's, as the violist returned as Professor at the Academy from 1924–29.[58]

Three pieces of documentary evidence point to, at the minimum, a musical familiarity between the two men prior to their involvement with the Viola Sonata. First, Tertis played the viola part in the premiere performance of Bliss's Quartet for Piano and Strings in A minor, along with Mrs. Herbert Withers (piano), Arthur Beckwith (violin), and Herbert Withers (cello). The Quartet received the War Emergency Entertainment prize and performance at Steinway Hall on April 20, 1915.[59] This performance was part of Isidore de Lara's concert series during wartime that promoted British chamber

[58] See Tertis, *My Viola and I,* 61; White, *Lionel Tertis,* chapters 2 and 6.
[59] Kenneth L. Thompson, "Catalogue of Works," *The Musical Times* 112, no. 1542 (1971), 666.

music.[60] Despite this collaboration between performer and composer, Bliss and Tertis did not meet during this performance, since Bliss was enlisted in the military at the time of the performance.

By July 1921, though, Bliss had become well aware of Tertis's playing. In 1919, Tertis, along with violinist Albert Sammons, cellist Felix Salmond, and pianist William Murdoch formed the Chamber Music Players, a piano quartet. They performed together for twenty-two years. Their first public performance was on January 6, 1921, featuring a Beethoven string trio, Bridge's *Phantasy Quartet,* Faure's G minor Piano Quartet, and the Handel-Halvorson *Passacaglia* for violin and viola. In a lecture given on July 2, 1921, entitled "What Modern Composition is Aiming At," Bliss extolled the richness of London's musical life. He identified, among two other recent performances, "the perfection of ensemble achieved by Messrs. Albert Sammons, Lionel Tertis, Felix Salmond, and William Murdoch of the Chamber Music Players."[61]

A final pre-Sonata connection between Tertis and Bliss came about through Tertis's long-standing mission of arranging, transcribing, and editing music for the viola. In 1923, Tertis arranged Bliss's Two Nursery Rhymes (1920) for soprano, viola, and piano, substituting the viola for the original's clarinet. Letters between Bliss and Tertis in March 1923, as well as subsequent letters between Bliss and Otto Kling, the director of J. & W. Chester Music Publishers, indicate Bliss's excited approval of the arrangement.[62]

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[60] Jane Angell, "Music and Charity on the British Home Front during the First World War," *Journal of Musicological Research* 33 (Jan/Sept 2014), 194–195.
[61] Arthur Bliss, "What Modern Composition is Aiming At," in *Bliss on Music*, ed. Gregory Roscow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 24.
[62] Stewart Craggs, *Arthur Bliss: A Source Book* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1996), 269.

While these three instances do not evince a long-standing and deep relationship, taken together, they nevertheless show repeated and respectful contact between the two musicians that understandably established the groundwork for the collaboration that resulted in the Viola Sonata.

4.3 The Viola Sonata

Composer and performer enjoyed a particularly fruitful collaboration during the creation of the Viola Sonata. Bliss wrote:

> I think my Viola Sonata should have Tertis' name coupled with mine as joint composers, for many times in the course of its composition I would be called to the telephone by Tertis with his viola at the other end. I would hear his voice "On page 17, line 3, do you like *this"*—I would then hear the tones of the viola—"or *this?"* He would then repeat the passage. "But, Lionel, I don't hear much difference." "But you *must,"* he would answer; "the first time I took two down bows, etc. etc."[63]

Evidence of Tertis's influence abounds in the score, from the liberal usage of the viola's highest range to the flowing lyrical lines to be played in higher positions on a single string. As occurred in his collaboration with the violinist Campoli, Bliss showed a keen in learning about instrumental technique, as he reflects that he "had a master class in viola playing quite free, and I am grateful."[64] Earlier in his autobiography, Bliss states that this collaboration was even more informative than his own individual viola lessons: "I learnt

[63] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 102.
[64] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 102.

more about the viola by writing a large-scale work for Lionel Tertis than I should have done in a year's tuition from this performing teacher [Wilhelm Sachse]."[65]

The precise impetus for the creation of sonata—whether Tertis approached Bliss, or vice versa—is difficult to ascertain.[66] Nevertheless, Bliss writes that "1933 was marked for me by my friendship with Lionel Tertis, and the completion of a large-scale Sonata for him," before going on to offer the superlative praise that "through his [Tertis's] influence the viola, that Cinderella of instruments, was crowned a princess."[67] The aforementioned private premiere took place on May 9, 1933, at the composer's home, before the public premiere on November 3, 1933. The premiere occurred at the BBC Broadcasting House as a part of their fortnightly chamber music series that was broadcast regionally.[68] In addition the Bliss sonata, Solomon and Tertis performed two of Tertis's arrangements from violin literature, Mozart's Sonata in A, K. 305 and Delius's Sonata no. 3. Solomon performed Chopin's B minor Sonata, and Tertis along with pianist Ernest Lush performed a selection of short viola works, including Szymanowski's *Chant de Roxane*, arranged by Kochanski–Tertis.[69]

Three reviews of the premiere performance offer positive and even-handed assessments of the Sonata and the players. In an unsigned review published in the *Times* on November 4, 1933, the reviewer writes that the work received "an ideal first public performance. It is a work of high interest and considerable beauty, in which the beauty appears first and the interest deepens later." In reference to a "fuzzy sound" in the viola's

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[65] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 26.
[66] John Sugden claims, without pointing to evidence, that "he [Tertis] asked the composer for a sonata and the request was accepted." John Sugden*, Sir Arthur Bliss* (London: Omnibus Press, 1997), 52.
[67] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 101.
[68] Marion Scott, "London Concerts," *The Musical Times* 74, no. 1090 (1933), 1129.
[69] See both Marion Scott, "London Concerts," 1129; and John White, *Lionel Tertis*, Appendix 4, loc. 7205.

middle register, the reviewer states that "it is difficult not to feel that this is violin music transposed," perhaps hinting at the frequent usage of upper register passagework. The review concludes with a somewhat stock compliment: "the work [. . .] offers an important addition to the viola-player's growing repertory of modern music."[70]

In a more detailed review in the December 1933 issue of *The Musical Times*, Marion M. Scott gives full-throated praise for the performance and the composition. Scott's article stands out for its effusive praise and astute musical insight, as he displays a remarkable ability to understand the work's musical structure upon just one hearing. He particularly notes Bliss's idiomatic writing for the viola and how the music is custom-fitted to Tertis's playing.

> Seldom has a new work left one with a livelier desire to hear it again. In the first place, it is most beautifully adapted to the character of the viola. Arthur Bliss shows an ever-growing capacity to 'get inside' the genius of each instrument, so that his compositions strike one not so much as outward applications to the oboe, clarinet, viola (or whatever the instrument is) as expressions of their inward and spiritual grace. [. . .] Secondly, whether he meant it or not, Arthur Bliss has mirrored something of Lionel Tertis's own character in the music—that exquisite artistic reticence which is yet compatible with such heartfelt expression. Thirdly, the Sonata attracts by its thematic material and the distinction of its design. [. . .] It would be a delight to analyse the work in detail. As to the performance, it was perfect.[71]

A final review of the premiere came from Ernest Newman, the chief music critic for the *Sunday Times,* who Bliss described as "a unique and eminent figure in our musical history."[72] Of the three reviews of the premiere, Newman's is the most tepid, though Bliss is spared from his notoriously sharp-tongued criticism. He focuses more on how the

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[70] Anon. "New Viola Sonata." *The Times* (London), November 4, 1933.
[71] Marion Scott, "London Concerts," 1129.
[72] Arthur Bliss, quoted in Paul Watt, *Ernest Newman: A Critical Biography* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017),

Sonata represents, for Bliss, a turn towards Romanticism—"the diet that suits music best"—and away from the "Silly Epoch" of experimentation. He gives a sterile compliment of the performance, describing it as "what even the composer would probably call a first-rate first performance," while later offering a more substantial endorsement of the composition: "What is certain is that the ideas of the work are distinguished, the fancy delightfully free, and the craftsmanship masterly."[73]

Tertis performed the sonata frequently in the months and years following the premiere. One notable performance occurred on January 26, 1935, with pianist Arthur Rubinstein joining Tertis for a concert in the BBC Broadcasting House featuring the Bliss Sonata, Bach's Chaconne, Schumann's *Carnaval*, and Tertis's arrangement of Beethoven's Variations on a Theme by Mozart, op. 66. Both Tertis and Bliss make note of this performance in their autobiographies due to the fact that Rubinstein first looked at the score to the Bliss Sonata only the morning of the concert. Despite this, Tertis remarked that "he [Rubinstein] gave an astounding performance, making light of the intricacies and technical difficulties of the piano part, and his interpretation musically was perfection."[74] Bliss called it "an electrifyingly assured performance."[75]

Outside of Tertis, other violists quickly adopted the sonata following its premiere. Tertis's student, Bernard Shore, performed the work along with Reginald Paul in an October 23, 1934 recital at the Contemporary Music Centre at the Hall of the College of Nursing. In his review in *The Musical Times,* Marion M. Scott called the work "one of the best sonatas of recent times," and went on to write that "From whatever side it is

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[73] Ernest Newman, quoted in John White, *Lionel Tertis,* ch. 8, loc. 2894.
[74] Tertis, *My Viola and I,* 77.
[75] Bliss, *As I Remember,* 102.

approached, it satisfies, for it unites poetry and logic, freedom and purpose, and is above all else, *music.*"[76] Another of Tertis's students, Harry Berly, performed the sonata in Wigmore Hall on June 22, 1935, along with works by Brahms, Bax, and the Handel-Halvorsen *Passacaglia* with Tertis.[77] Tertis continued to perform Bliss's Sonata even after his brief retirement from 1937–39, as he and Solomon performed it at least until 1944, if not later.[78]

One more performance by Tertis and Solomon is noteworthy despite its eventual cancellation. Bliss gave three lectures at the Royal Institution on March 8, 15, and 22, 1934. The lectures, entitled "Aspects of Contemporary Music," provide the clearest view of Bliss's musical perspective and compositional process. The first two lectures deal with the current state of contemporary music, while in the third, Bliss turns the lens onto his own musical craftsmanship. In this lecture, Bliss planned on using the Viola Sonata to illustrate his idea of creating music unity through "diversity, the employment not of one idea that spreads, but of two or more antagonistic ideas that are gradually compelled to harmonize and form one complete whole."[79] Bliss had prepared "a detailed analysis" of the sonata, to "demonstrate how growth could take place almost from bar to bar," but he was forced to substitute Clarinet Quintet (performed by Frederick Thurston and the Griller Quartet) in its place. Tertis, an avid motorcar enthusiast, burned his hand on the radiator of his car and had to withdraw from the performance. Although the performance

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[76] Marion M. Scott, "Chamber Music of the Month," *The Musical Times* 75, no. 1102 (Dec. 1934), 1129.
[77] Marion M. Scott, "Chamber Music of the Month," *The Musical Times* 76, no. 1110 (Aug. 1935): 741.
[78] John White, *Lionel Tertis,* Appendix 4, loc. 7503.
[79] Arthur Bliss, "Aspects of Contemporary Music," in *Bliss on Music*, ed. Gregory Roscow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102.

was canceled, the lecture resulted in some of the most concrete and definitive commentary from Bliss himself about the viola sonata.[80]

[80] See Arthur Bliss, "Sonata for Viola and Piano," in *Bliss on Music*, ed. Gregory Roscow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 284–85.

CHAPTER 5. PERFORMING THE SONATA

In this chapter, I address the unique technical and expressive challenges encountered by the violist when performing the Bliss Viola Sonata. This chapter contains an analysis of the following performance considerations: left-hand technique, right-hand technique, ensemble issues, and musical expression. The goal of this chapter is to provide the violist with a thorough examination of the challenges presented by Bliss's Viola Sonata with the hope of making them more understandable and digestible, which should eventually lead to an easier learning process.

5.1 Left-Hand Technique

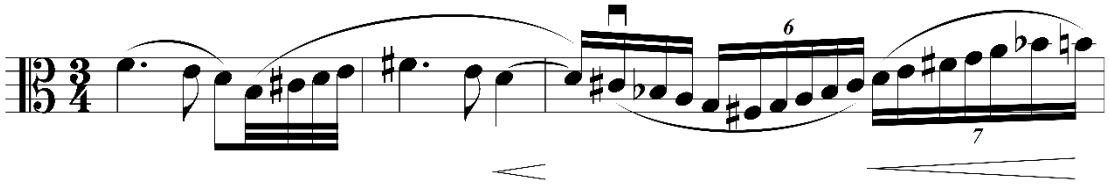
Given the neo-tonal character of the Sonata, Bliss's harmonic language itself presents, from the first moments of the sonata, specific and unique challenges to the left hand. All left-hand difficulties can be broken into two distinct categories: dexterity and intonation. While the sonata's virtuosic elements most certainly challenge the performer's left-hand dexterity, the more elemental and essential challenges posed by the sonata are with intonation. The main considerations affecting intonation are hand frame, i.e., the spacing of the fingers within a single position, and shifting. I begin by discussing hand frame, as it is a more fundamental technique than shifting.

5.1.1 Hand Frame and Finger Patterns

A great deal of Classical and Romantic era music for viola lies within several standard configurations of whole and half steps between the fingers within one position. These configurations are outlined by a perfect fourth between the first and fourth finger,

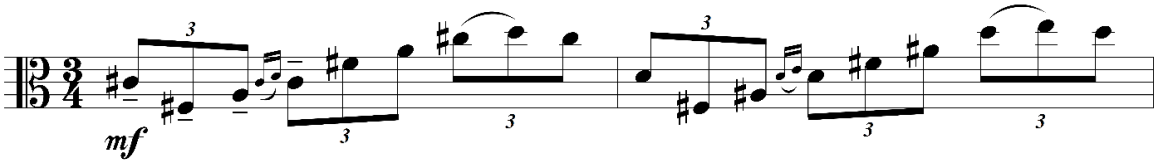
and the three possible patterns of whole and half steps in between. Because Classical and Romantic music is more frequently performed, violists become more comfortable and accustomed to these patterns, thereby resulting in quick recognition and playability of music that uses these patterns. Yet, because Modern-era music employs more variety and variability in pitch than the music of other eras, players must rely on more varied and less-standardized patterns of left-hand fingers. Generally speaking, the violist cannot as consistently rely upon the perfect fourth delimitation between first and fourth fingers when playing modern music as opposed to the music of other eras.

While Bliss's Sonata is, strictly speaking, a tonal work, his way of defining tonality and his liberal usage of chromaticism calls for a wide variety of finger positions within a single position. In a basic example, his frequent usage of augmented seconds in scalar passages forces the player to deviate from standard finger spacing (ex. 5.1). The difficulty in this instance can be overcome by using open strings and a fourth finger on the C-sharp; however, the player must be aware that this results in a contracted hand frame, in which the interval between first and fourth fingers is a major third (instead of the typical perfect fourth).



Example 5.1. Arthur Bliss, Sonata for Viola and Piano, mvt. I, mm. 4–6. Augmented seconds in the viola part in m. 6.

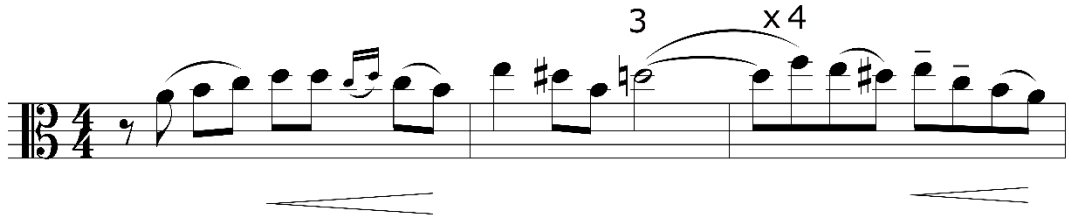
Two instances of augmented triads in the first movement also call for special attention to left-hand frame. For the augmented triad in m. 64, shown in example 5.2, the A-sharp requires the first finger to extend backward, while the fourth finger remains on E, resulting in a tritone spacing between first and fourth fingers. The difficulty is heightened here because the first finger plays E on the D-string in the grace notes that are two triplet eights before the A-sharp, requiring a change of finger position. The musically parallel passage in m. 178 requires similar adjustments with the third finger.



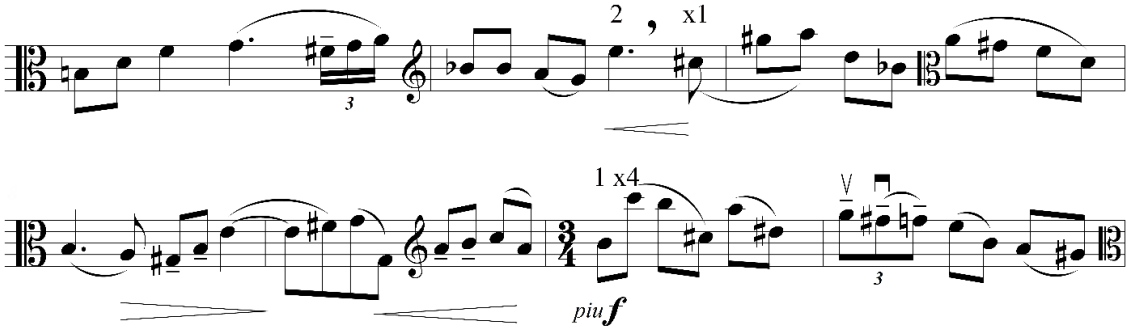
Example 5.2. Arthur Bliss, Sonata for Viola and Piano, mvt. I, mm. 63–64. The tritone spacing between first and fourth fingers in m. 64 on the A string.

In addition to unique finger patterns within a standard hand frame, the Bliss Sonata requires the performer to frequently extend or contract the hand frame. Several extended positions appear within short succession at the beginning of the second movement (ex. 5.3). If played on the A-string, a fairly standard fourth-finger extension of a half step can be used to play the F in m. 14. The fingering in m. 14 leads to an augmented second between third and second fingers. Shortly following this moment, larger leaps and extensions occur in mm. 17–18 and 21 (ex. 5.4). Measure 17 works best in third position, which necessitates the first finger to extend back to C-sharp before the leap up to G-sharp. Later, an extended fourth finger on the C-natural in m. 21 facilitates a legato connection between the first two eighth notes of the measure. This minor ninth is

best played while firmly grounded in fifth position, allowing the lower B and C-sharp to be played with first and second fingers, respectively.

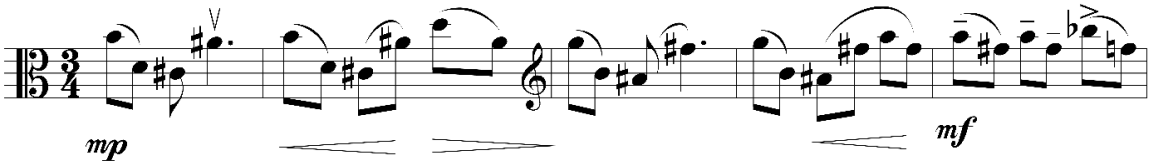


Example 5.3. Arthur Bliss, Sonata for Viola and Piano, mvt. II, mm. 12–14. The fourth finger extends for the F-natural in m. 14.



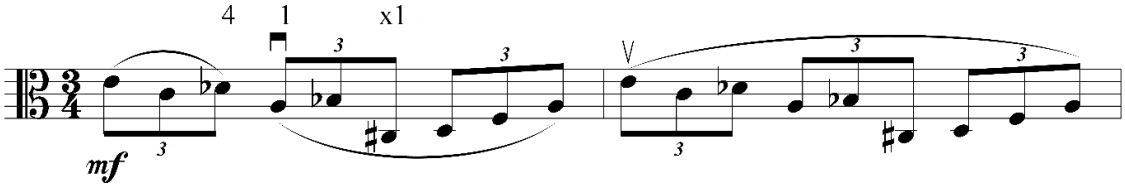
Example 5.4. Arthur Bliss, Sonata for Viola and Piano, mvt. II, mm. 16–21. Extensions in measures 17 and 21.

Coupled with enharmonic reading, extensions allow for elegant solutions to the many large leaps in the second movement. In m. 67, thinking of the A-sharp as a B-flat enables a more understandable fourth-finger extension in fourth position to the D-natural. This enharmonic substitution also makes the first note of the next measure, G, feel like a simple whole step across strings from the preceding A-sharp. The phrase from mm. 66–72 begins with a chromatic ascent; the use of extensions eliminates the necessity for shifting and results in more secure intonation (ex. 5.5 mm. 66–70).



Example 5.5. Arthur Bliss, Sonata for Viola and Piano, mvt. II, mm. 66–70. Enharmonic readings in mm. 67 and 68 allow for more easily understood fingerings.

Though not as problematic as extensions, contracted hand frames must also be acknowledged and understood. Measures 49 and 50 in the second movement features both contractions and extensions (ex. 5.6). The interval between first and fourth fingers is a diminished fourth and the first finger is required to alternate between C-sharp and D.



Example 5.6. Arthur Bliss, Sonata for Viola and Piano, mvt. II, mm. 49–50. A contracted hand frame with a diminished fourth between fourth and first fingers.

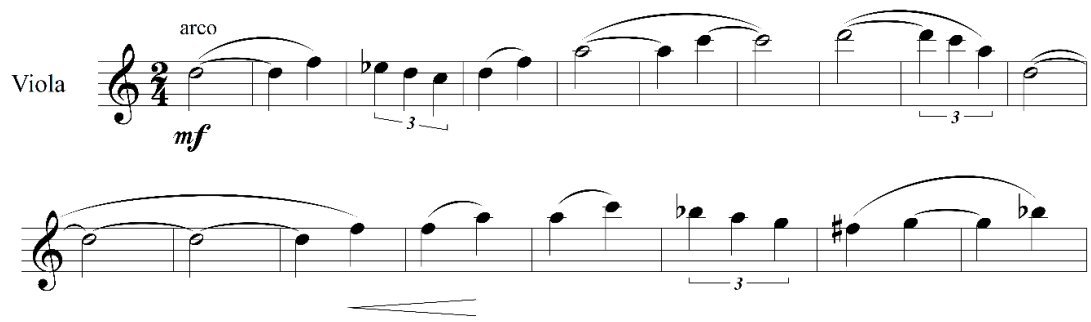
5.1.2 Shifting and High Passages

Bliss's Sonata poses particular challenges in terms of shifting and high-register playing. These arise from both logistical and expressive causes, i.e., the ranges Bliss employs, and the contours of the actual musical lines. First of all, Bliss freely explores the viola's highest register, frequently writing music that is significantly higher than what is found in standard orchestral or chamber music repertoire. Secondly, the contour and jagged shape of the viola's lines—which includes numerous instances of octave displacement, sometimes for only a single note—requires a nimble and constantly

shifting left hand. These two features couple with Tertis's adventurous fingering suggestions—he edited the viola part—to present a formidable technical challenge for shifting and high playing.

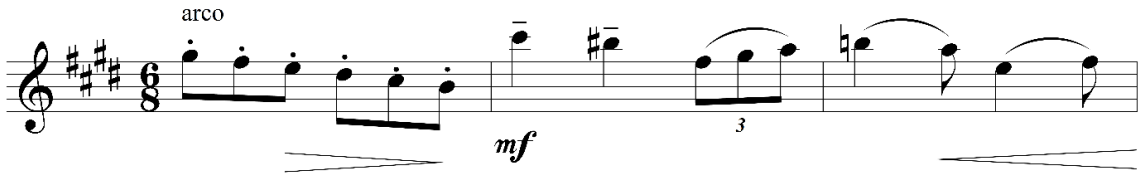
5.1.3 The Viola's Register in Bliss's Chamber Music

Prior to writing the Viola Sonata, the range of Bliss's viola parts remained couched comfortably in its middle and lower registers, with limited forays into the higher register. By tracing his chamber music from his earliest works to the Viola Sonata, a gentle trend of ever-heightening range appears when moving forward chronologically through Bliss's chamber music; however, the Viola Sonata represents a disproportionate expansion of into the viola's highest register based upon the overall trend. In his String Quartet (1914) and Piano Quintet (1915), Bliss rarely requires the viola to shift above third position on the A-string, with a few isolated exceptions in the String Quartet totaling only three notes that require positions above third. See, for instance, mm. 177–178 in the first movement that contain an A, the octave above the open A, and the D above it, respectively. In the Oboe Quintet (1927), twenty-six notes require the violist to shift above third position. The majority of these fall in the work's virtuosic 6/8-meter third movement. The extended range for the viola here can be seen as one element of the movement's virtuosic and boundary-pressing writing. Eleven of these notes are found in the viola's lyrical and soaring treble melody in mm. 174–91 (ex. 5.7). Though this is the highest and most extended treble passage in Bliss's chamber music up until this point, its range looks relatively low when compared to the uppermost passages in the Viola Sonata.



Example 5.7. Arthur Bliss, Oboe Quintet, mvt. III, mm. 174–191, viola part.

The Clarinet Quintet (1932), which immediately precedes the Viola Sonata in chronology, represents the next logical step up in the ever-expanding range for the viola in Bliss's chamber music. By the work's twenty-ninth measure, the viola is already exploring its newfound range with three upper register notes—C, B, and A—that punctuate the music's texture. Though only twenty-five pitches require positions higher than third, making this almost exactly similar to the Oboe Quintet five years earlier, the high notes in the Clarinet Quintet are almost always arrived at through large leaps upwards. For example, see mm. 104–106 in the fourth movement, in which the viola ascends a major ninth after a six-note descending scale (ex. 5.8). As with the other works, ten of the twenty-five upper register notes appear in the quintet's most virtuosic movement, the fourth movement.



Example 5.8. Arthur Bliss, Clarinet Quintet, mvt. IV, mm. 104–106. High register in the viola part, and octave displacement.

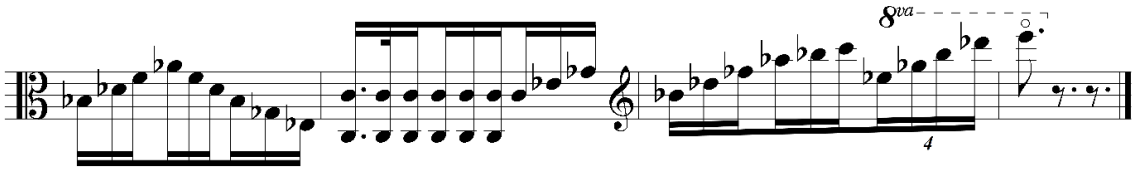
Bliss exploits the viola's high registers in the Viola Sonata in ways that he never did before or after. In both frequency of upper register writing and relative highest notes, the Viola Sonata greatly supersedes all of his other writing for the viola. By the eighth measure of the sonata, the viola already stretches up to C-sharp, playable only in sixth position or above. In the ninety-ninth measure of the first movement, Bliss already requires the viola to play more notes above third position than in any other movement in his previous chamber works. In total, the first movement alone contains ninety notes only playable in positions above third, a number that exceeds the combined number of such notes, 86, in the eight works that comprise his entire string chamber music output up until this point.[81] It is clear that Bliss greatly expanded his conception of the viola's range when writing the Viola Sonata.

With the only two major chamber music works—String Quartet no. 3 (1941) and no. 4 (1950)—that Bliss wrote following the Viola Sonata, he returned to the viola ranges used in the Oboe and Clarinet Quintets. The Third String Quartet has nineteen notes above third position, and the Fourth Quartet has twenty-nine. From this overall comparison, we can see that Bliss handled the viola writing differently in the Viola Sonata in comparison to all of his other chamber music. While snatches of melody appear in upper registers in the rest of the chamber music, the Viola Sonata contains an exponentially larger number of these notes. From this observation, we can reach two conclusions. First, Bliss treated the viola like a true solo instrument in the sonata, pushing it to its extremes. This is also supported by Bliss's stated intention of turning the work

[81] This number includes the following works: String Quartet [no. 1] (1914), Quartet for Piano and Strings, *Madam Noy, Rhapsody, Conversations, Rout,* Quintet for Oboe and Strings, and Quintet for Clarinet and Strings.

into a concerto.[82] Secondly, as this was Bliss's only work written with and for Tertis, it can be safely assumed that Tertis's facility and predilection for high-register playing were at least partially responsible for the marked uptick in high notes in the sonata. The richness of upper-register writing is the clearest indication of Tertis's fingerprint on the work.

5.1.4 High Registers in the Viola Sonata

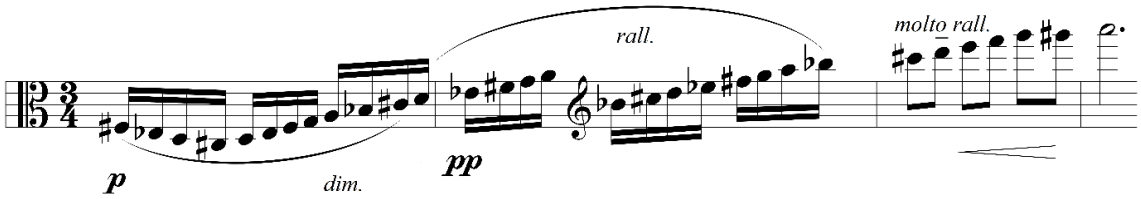


Example 5.9. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 252–255. The highest note of the entire sonata.

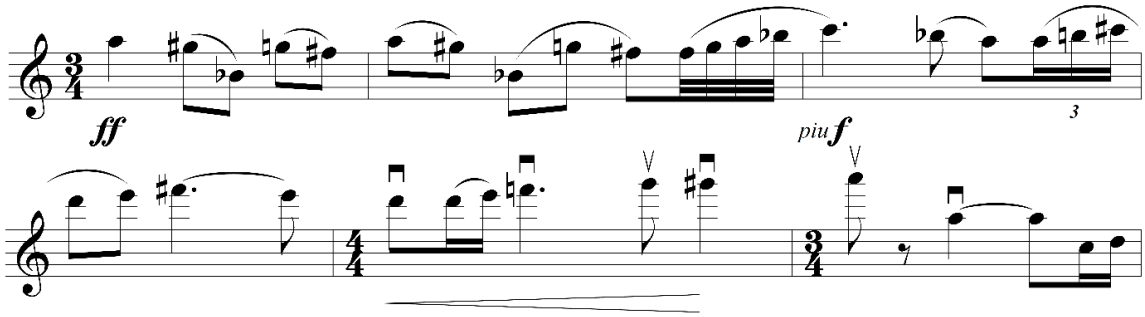
As noted above, Bliss's intentions for exploring the viola's upper register are made immediately clear by the work's eighth measure. For the highest note in the entire sonata, Bliss writes for the viola to reach up to an E, two octaves and a fifth above the open A-string. This note is the most extreme example of Bliss's register-expanding writing in the work. It occurs at the end of the third movement, as the viola concludes its raging and propulsive cadenza with a stratospherically ascending arpeggio (ex. 5.9, mm. 252–55). In less extreme circumstances, but nevertheless very high, the music reaches up to an A, two octaves above the open A-string, at two important structural moments. See example 5.10a from the first movement (m. 211) and example 5.10b from the fourth

[82] Bliss, *As I Remember*, 102

movement (m. 55). The high note in both instances is the pinnacle of a stepwise ascending scale and both occur within the phrases of their respective movements. Bliss's inclusion of optional *ossia* lines at least an octave lower than the original notes show his acknowledgment of the great technical demand his high-register writing placed on the viola player.



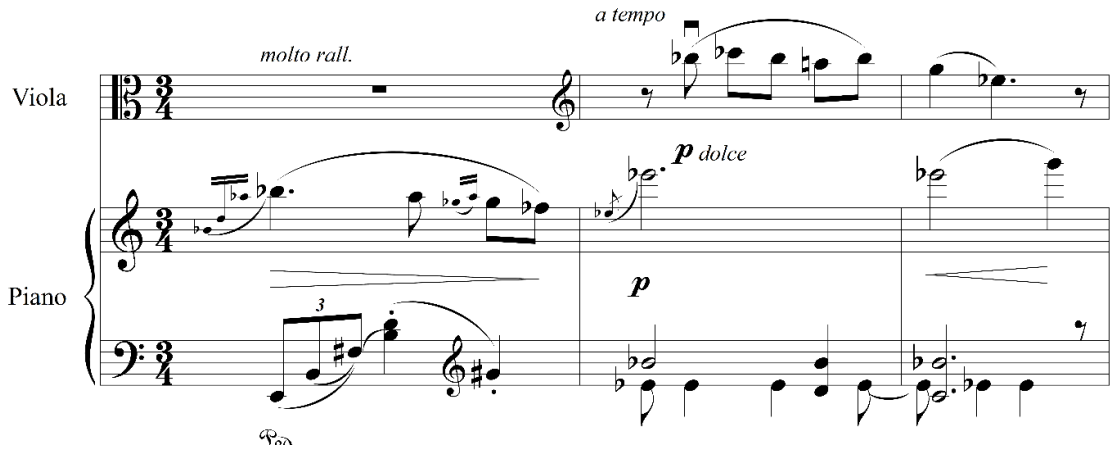
Example 5.10a. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. I, mm. 208–211. Viola part with ossia *omitted.*



Example 5.10b. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. IV, mm. 47–52. Viola part with ossia *omitted.*

Aside from these three outstanding instances, Bliss frequently places the viola in registers where the player must use sixth, seventh, and eighth positions. Upper-register melodic writing for the viola was not altogether uncommon, but it is nevertheless noteworthy when considering the performance difficulties presented by this sonata. An entrance like the one in measure 144 in the first movement poses several challenges (ex. 5.11, mm. 143–145). After settling on an unstable tritone double stop on the C- and G-strings in m. 142 to conclude the previous phrase, the violist has four beats of rests to find

the seventh-position B-flat on the A-string. Adding to this physical difficulty of moving a great distance is the music's sudden change in mood from the scherzando-like character in measures 136–142 to the *dolce* gently rocking figure in measure 144. Furthermore, the open fifths harmony in the piano (E-flats and B-flat only), also a sudden shift from the passage before, means that even the slightest intonation imperfection on the viola's first note will be clearly noticeable. It seems, though, that Bliss might have known this, as he foreshadows the viola's entrance pitch by having the piano play the exact same pitch on the downbeat of m. 143.

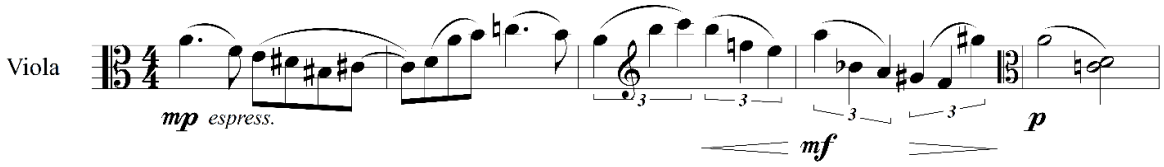


Example 5.11. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. I, mm. 143–45.

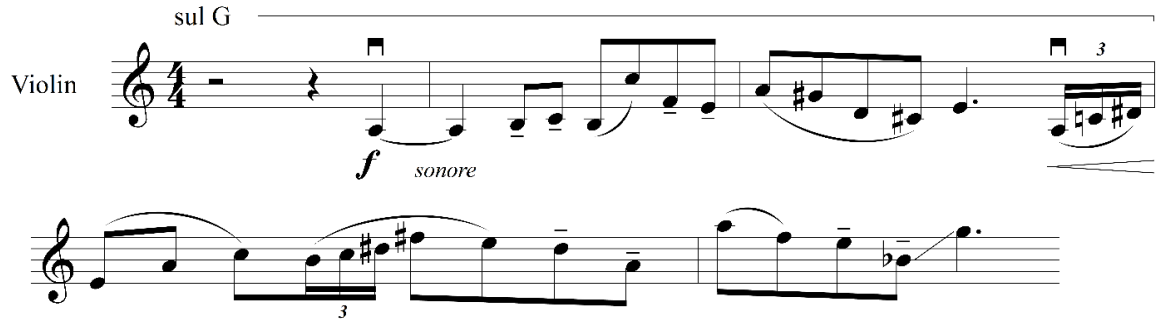
5.1.5 Shifting

The very nature of Bliss's melodic material in the Viola Sonata requires the violist to freely and quickly change positions, at times even for just a single note. Throughout all of his compositions, Bliss frequently used octave displacement to enliven his melodic lines. Examples of this technique can be found in most of his works. Several notable instances from his writing for string instruments can be found in the Third String

Quartet (ex. 5.12a), the Clarinet Quintet (see ex. 5.8 above), and in the opening of the Violin Concerto (ex. 5.12b).



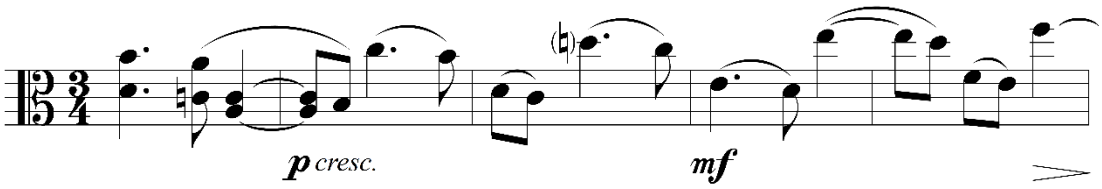
Example 5.12a. Arthur Bliss, String Quartet no. 3 (1941), mvt. I, mm. 220–224.



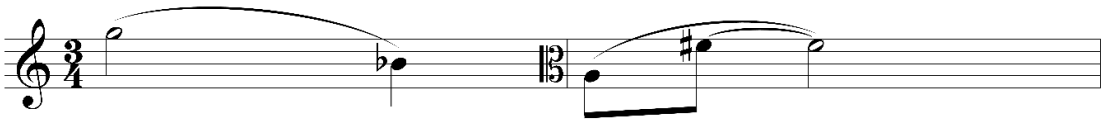
Example 5.12b. Arthur Bliss, Violin Concerto, mvt. I, mm. 7–11.

In the Viola Sonata, Bliss weaves the idea of melodic octave displacement into the fabric of the work from its outset. The notes on the downbeat of the first two measures in which the viola plays (mm. 2 and 3) are an augmented octave apart, connected by a swinging arpeggio. Later on, this gesture expands during the viola's optimistically reaching melody in mm. 54–59. The simple ascending melody is decorated when the viola leaps up a ninth once per measure, creating an off-beat swing and well-balanced contrary motion (ex. 5.13). The ascending leaps of a ninth and subsequent downward leaps require the violist to rapidly shift between positions. Tertis's fingering

suggestion for this passage to be played on primarily the D and G strings adds further difficulty and more shifts than a different string combination. Another instance of this occurs in the coda when Bliss breaks with a melodic pattern from the preceding measures and adds an octave displacement (ex. 5.14, mm. 27–28).



Example 5.13. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. I, mm. 54–58.



Example 5.14. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. IV, mm. 27–28.

5.1.6 Tertis's Fingerings

Tertis is listed as the editor of the viola part in the score, but his involvement in the creating of the sonata was far greater than merely editing the viola part. Because Bliss elevated Tertis to the status of "joint composer" for the sonata, his fingerings merit additional attention.[83] Surely, by bestowing upon Tertis such an honorific title, Bliss signaled that Tertis and he were aligned not only on a technical basis but more importantly on a musical and expressive level as well. Having been inexorably tied to the

[83] Bliss, *As I Remember*, 102.

creation of this sonata, and as the dedicatee—"In admiration–to Lionel Tertis"[84]—and performer in the premiere, Tertis and his fingerings carry additional historical importance in comparison to those of, for instance, any contemporary violist's edition of the Brahms sonatas.

No matter the editor's proximity to the creation of a piece of music, their editorial markings confront the performer with difficult decisions about performing as faithfully to the score as possible. It is worthwhile to remember that any editor's markings represent that person's unique point of view and reflect their own technical strengths and weaknesses, and not necessarily the intention of the composer. Because of his involvement in the composition of the sonata, however, Tertis's fingerings make this confrontation even more fraught than with other works. Are we to take Tertis's fingerings as part of the authentic musical text? If one chooses alternative fingerings and strings besides what Tertis indicates, does that make their performance less faithful to the musical text? Additionally, how much of Bliss's own timbral concept of the sonata was a direct result of Tertis's playing, especially his choices of playing in high positions on low strings? These are unanswerable questions, but we know from Bliss's own statements that Tertis actively sought the composer's feedback on differing technical options, which may have caused Bliss to alter elements of the composition.[85]

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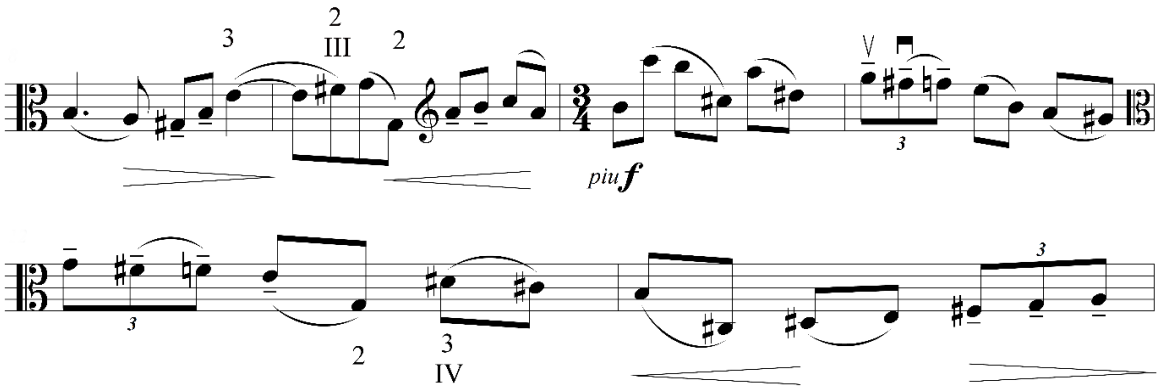
[84] Arthur Bliss, *Sonata for Viola and Pianoforte* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

[85] Bliss wrote: "many times in the course of its composition I would be called to the telephone by Tertis with his viola at the other end. I would hear his voice "On page 17, line 3, do you like *this"*—I would then hear the tones of the viola—"or *this?"* He would then repeat the passage. "But, Lionel, I don't hear much difference." "But you *must,"* he would answer; "the first time I took two down bows, etc. etc." From *As I Remember,* 102.

Tertis possessed extraordinary left-hand facility for a violist in his time, and he was not afraid to show it off.[86] This ability undoubtedly affected his technical imagination for handling passages in the Bliss sonata. In instances peppered throughout the sonata, Tertis indicates "unnecessary" fingerings that use high positions on the C, G, and D strings; "unnecessary" because the notes could be played, often with less technical difficulty, on higher strings in lower positions. But for Tertis, these fingerings were completely necessary, for they allowed him to create the tone colors he imagined for his own artistic expression.

In some instances, though, these fingerings do more harm than good. They can further complicate the technical act of performing the work, which can distract both the performer and audience from the intended artistic expression. When deciding on whether or not to climb higher on a single string, it is important to make sure that the act of climbing higher—i.e., the technique of shifting—does not become the performer's main focus and thereby overshadow the musical effect of the passage. Such journeys should be undertaken in order to access a specific color and tone not present in lower positions, and not for virtuosic showmanship. Positions higher than fourth on the lower strings offer special tonal characters, with their acoustically compromised, tenuous sounds.

[86] He performed Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto untransposed on the viola. See White, *Lionel Tertis,* loc. 330.

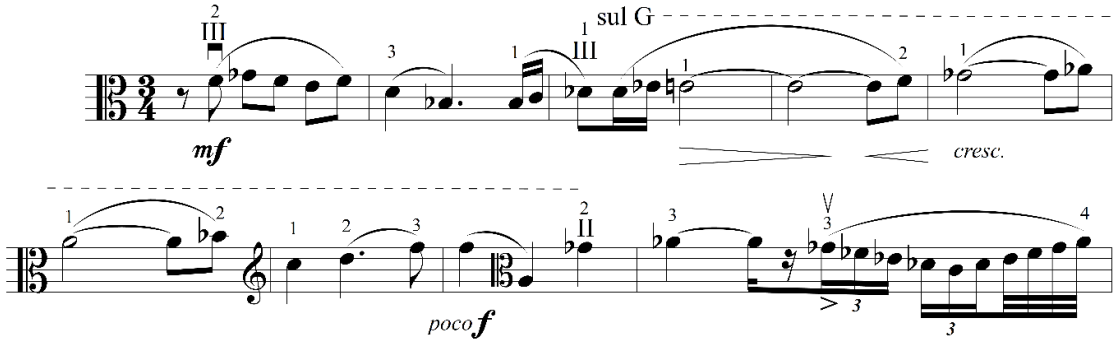


Example 5.15. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 19–24. Tertis's fingerings and strings indicated here.

A passage from the beginning of the second moment (mm. 19–25, ex. 5.15) illustrates both the benefits and detractions of higher positions. Tertis indicates to play on the G-string from the final beat of m. 18 until the second beat of m. 20, giving the viola a darker, more covered tone that aptly matches the calming of the music following the phrase's climax on the first beat of m. 18. This fingering works especially well because it enables a soft tone color on the G on the second beat of m. 20, which matches the softer harmonic movement of the piano that shifts a half step lower, from a C-sharp minor seventh chord on the third beat of m. 19 to a C-natural minor seventh chord on the second beat of m. 20. Yet, on the eighth note following this G in m. 20, Tertis somewhat inexplicably shifts down two positions and changes strings in order to play the second eighth note of the second beat on the C string, rather than a more simply played open G. This fingering shows his intention to maintain a more covered sound, but the shift, string crossing, and subsequent string crossing between the C and D strings means that the musical line will be more interrupted than if an open G were used. Three measures later, a similar avoidance of an open strings leads Tertis into sixth position on the C string on the third beat of m. 23. While this fingering allows for a continuous line and *sul C* effect

from this beat until the second beat of m. 25, sixth position on the C string on many violas is peppered with wolf tones, and depending on the instrument, can result in unclear and compromised sound, in direct opposition to Bliss's *più forte* and crescendo markings.

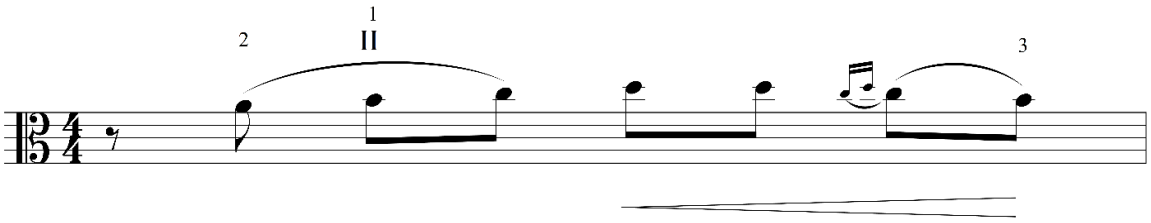
The most extreme example of Tertis's use of high positions on lower strings occurs in the first movement, mm. 148–155 (ex. 5.16). Marked *sul G,* he instructs the violist to shift to eleventh position on the G string, which can result in a strained sound. To play this high on the G-string, great consideration must be taken with bow contact point, weight, and speed in order to preserve the integrity of the tone. This fingering can work, however, depending on the instrument, because the piano's melody—the leading voice here—remains lower than the viola during mm. 150–155, the entire duration of Tertis's *sul G* marking.



Example 5.16. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. I, mm. 148–156. Tertis's sul G *marking.*

There are two other particular quirks of Tertis's fingering method that are related: an avoidance of the fourth finger and shifts during slurs. Though he indicates the use of the fourth finger frequently in fast passages, Tertis rarely indicates it in legato and melodic lines, instead opting for an additional shift to avoid melodic notes on the fourth

finger. Shifting underneath a slur leads to interruptions of a legato line, which is often undesirable. Measure 12 in the second movement (ex. 5.17) contains two shifts under slurs (one on the first beat; the other on the fourth beat) that could otherwise be avoided by playing the entire measure in fourth position, using the fourth finger on the third-beat D. Tertis was well aware that shifts under slurs can interrupt legato lines. In his essay "Beauty of Tone in String Playing," he devotes one of the three sections covering the left hand to *portamento*, advising the reader to "always be discreet" when sliding.[87] His recordings, especially in the opening of the Bax sonata, however, belie his written statements as they display a far more overt and widespread usage of audible portamento than his writings would suggest.[88]



Example 5.17. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt II, m. 12. Tertis's fingerings.

To summarize, Tertis's fingerings in the viola part are a valuable, though peripheral, element of the musical text of this sonata. The piano score contains only nineteen fingering indications in the viola line (fifteen open string indications, and four harmonics), which presumably come from Bliss. All other fingerings, which appear in the

[87] Lionel Tertis, "Beauty of Tone in String Playing," in *My Viola and I* (London: Elek Books Limited, 1974), 149.
[88] He recorded the work in 1929 with Bax playing piano. See Lionel Tertis, *Lionel Tertis plays Bax, Brahms, Bach, Delius,* recorded 1929, Pearl 9918, 1991, compact disc.

viola part only, come from Tertis. These fingerings in the viola score clearly capture aspects of Tertis's playing style and display his preferences for expressive shifts and usage of high positions on all strings. Fingerings are an individual aspect of each performer's expression; as such, Tertis's fingerings, though more closely related to the creation of this work than is normally the case with performer's editions, should nevertheless be treated as suggestions and only one way of handling the musical expression of the sonata.

5.1.7 Double Stops

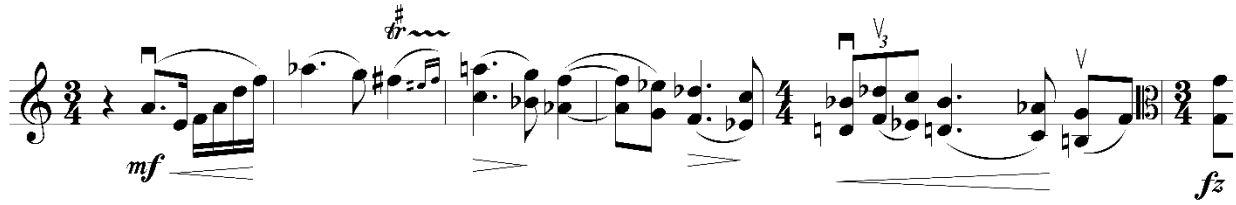
The sonata contains isolated but not infrequent double-stop passages. These passages pose particular difficulties for intonation and general left-hand dexterity and should be highlighted when preparing this sonata for performance. Overall, the vast majority—over sixty percent—of the double stops in the sonata are sixths. Of the 195 double stops in the sonata (not including three- and four-note chords), 119 are sixths, which is over four times as many as the next highest double stop, thirds. See table 5.1 for a complete listing of all of the multiple stops in the sonata.

Table 5.1. Type and frequency of double stops in Bliss's Viola Sonata.

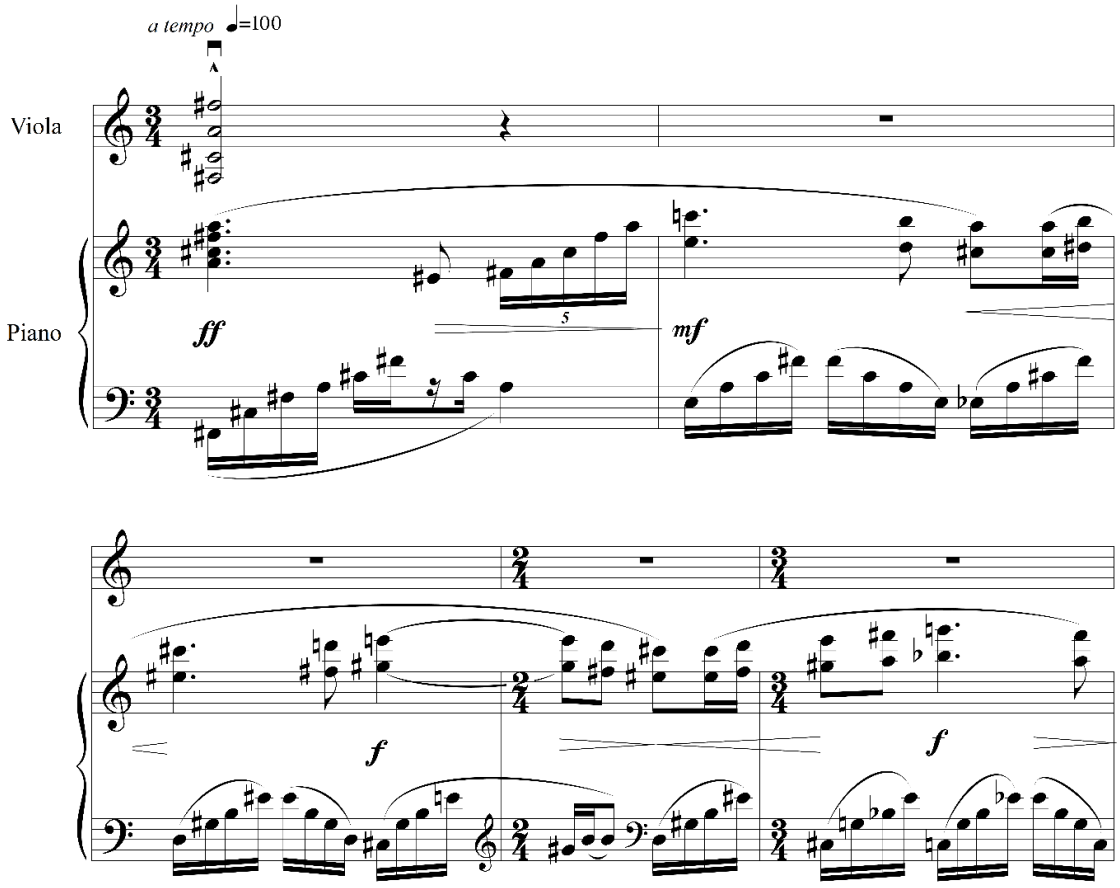
Double Stop Interval	**Frequency**
Sixth	119
Third	27
Octave	23
Perfect fourth	11
Tritone	5
Perfect fifth	4
Minor second	2
Major second	2
Minor seventh	2
Total	**195**

Although there exists no documentation from either Bliss or Tertis concerning the specific reason for the prevalence of sixths, certain musical features of the sonata make it an apt choice.[89] Of all the intervals possible to be played as double stops, sixths on the viola lend themselves best to presenting the major/minor false relation that is a defining harmonic feature of the sonata. The first double stop passage in the sonata, mm. 30–32 in the first movement, uses sixths to outline a variety of triadic major/minor false relations (ex. 5.18). It is preceded by even clearer false relations in sixths in the right hand of the piano in measures 24–27 (ex. 5.19). After the first movement, the false relation sixths appear in another straightforward presentation in the third movement, in measures 139–43 (ex. 5.20).

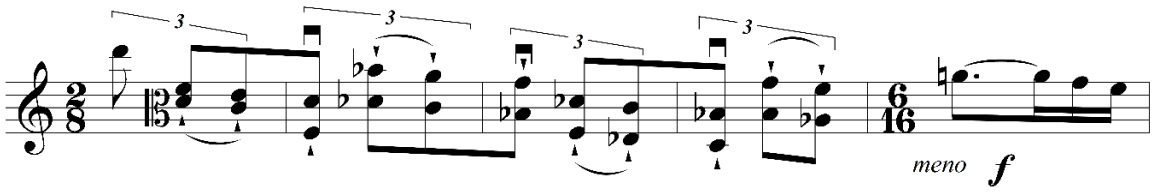
[89] One possible explanation for the prevalence of sixths (a consonant interval) in Bliss's and his contemporaries' music can be found by reaching back to John Dunstable (1390–1453) and the tradition of English decant. Dunstable and his contemporaries wrote music with a higher abundance of thirds and sixths than found in previous eras. The improvisatory practice of "faburden" in 15th-century England placed the plainchant cantus firmus in the middle of the three voices, often resulting in 6–3 chords. By the later 15th century, "the faburden usually came to be thought of as lying a sixth below the chant" (Caldwell, *The Oxford History of English Music*, vol. 1, p. 180). Margaret Bent writes that "it is in duets that the English handling of discant is seen at its most perfect, with a high proportion of vertical 3rds and 6ths" (Bent, Margaret. "Dunstaple [Dunstable, Dunstapell, Dumstable, Donstaple, etc.], John." Grove Music Online. 2001; Accessed 6 Sep. 2019.).



Example 5.18. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. I, mm. 28–33. False relations in sixths in the viola part.



Example 5.19. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. I, mm. 22–27. False relations in sixths in the right hand of the piano.



Example 5.20. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 138–143. False relations in sixths in the viola.

Another work where viola false relations in sixths are featured prominently is Walton's Viola Concerto, composed in 1928–29. The false relations here are even more integral into the motivic and musical fabric of the concerto than they are in Bliss's sonata, and they are placed in prominent structural positions in the work. It is quite plausible that Bliss was familiar with the piece, especially because Tertis first performed it on September 4, 1930, and played it frequently in the following years.[90]

Overall, when Bliss writes double stops, they appear in a high concentration, but each passage is placed far away from other double-stop passages. In a particular segment of the third movement, for instance, 103 measures separate one double stop from the next. From the performer's perspective, the densely concentrated, but not frequent, placement of double stop passages allows for a clear delineation of technical attention between single stops and multiple stops. In order for the musical effect of the major/minor false relation in sixths to be sounded clearly, precise intonation is paramount during the double stops.

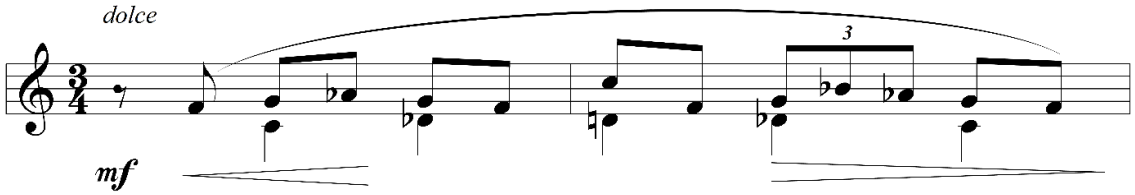
[90] Walton's concerto, which he readily admitted, was influenced by Hindemith's *Kammermusik no. 5* for viola and chamber orchestra, in which false relations of sixths also feature prominently in the second and fourth movements. So, a line of influence can be drawn from Hindemith to Walton, and to Bliss. For Walton's claim about *Kammermusik,* see Michael Kennedy, "Viola Concerto, 1928–9." *Portrait of Walton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 49.

5.2 Right-Arm Technique

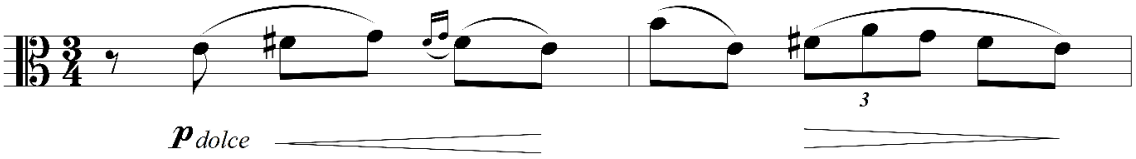
Generally speaking, technical challenges facing the bow and bow arm are more abstract and less piece-specific than those facing left-hand technique. While a few features of this sonata merit careful attention to the bow, this work does not pose insurmountable challenges to an advanced player with competent right-arm technique. The element of performance in which a creative imagination and right-arm variability matter most is ensemble balance between viola and piano, which is discussed in a later section. The three general categories that will be covered here are: slurs and sound production, articulations, and endurance.

Upon close inspection, Bliss succeeded with flying colors in crafting a work that limits the difficulty imposed on right-arm technique. How much of this is because of his collaboration with Tertis is difficult to know, as his earlier works for strings show the same level of consideration of playability. Bliss's slur groupings are eminently logical and group notes and articulations in a way that is easily playable with few alterations needed. Across the entire sonata, Bliss writes only two slurs that exceed three beats in length, and both are during dynamics of ***mp*** or softer. Short slurs ensure that the performer will always have enough bow length to execute select passages. However, Bliss's dogmatic devotion to short slurs causes interruptions to lyrical lines. To avoid these interruptions, violists must use extra caution to ensure bow changes are smooth and connected. In the seventh theme in the first movement (mm. 79–80), Bliss writes a total of four slurs across the first two measures, but the music could be easily played with only two bows. When the piano introduces this theme, however, Bliss writes one slur over the same two measures (ex. 5.21) showing his conceptualization of a unified two-measure

phrase. The extra bows in the viola part provide flexibility for shaping, but care must be taken to make sure that the bow changes do not interrupt the musical line.



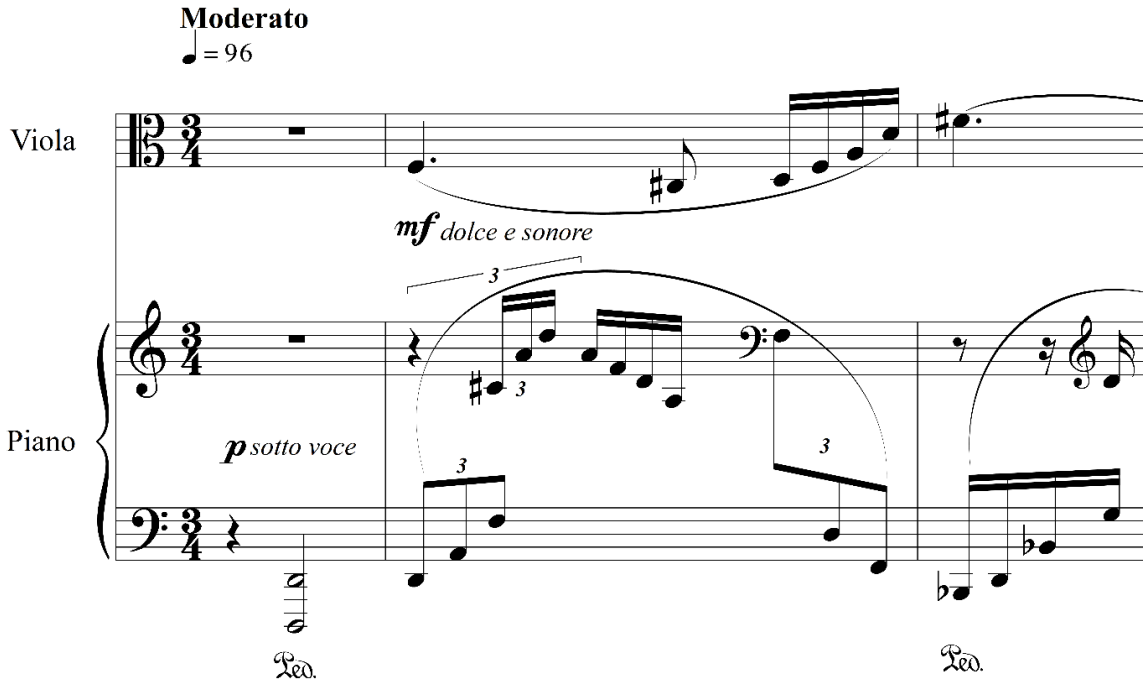
Example 5.21a. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt I, mm. 74–75. Right hand of the piano.



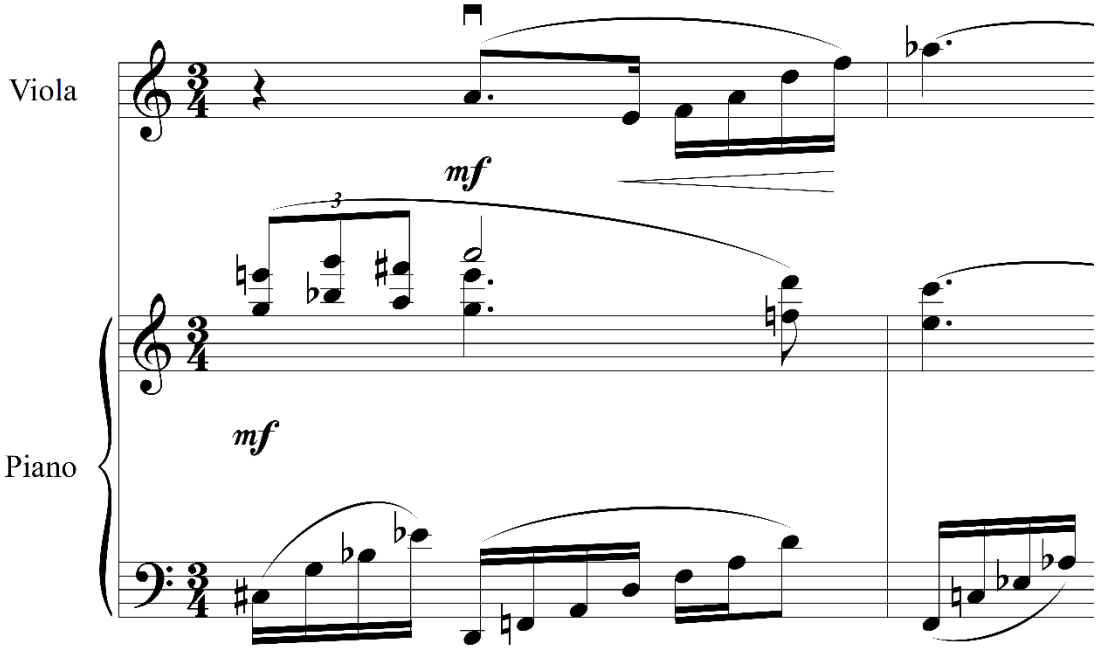
Example 5.21b. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt I, mm. 79–80. Viola part. Note the different slur patterns for the same melody between examples 21a and 21b.

Slur groupings and bow divisions are a major factor determining sound production. In order to capture the grandiosity of this work, violists must produce enough sound to ensure a musically effective performance. The viola's opening gesture of the sonata (m. 2, ex. 5.22), which returns throughout the first and fourth movements, presents a challenge for both sound production and expression. Bliss slurs three beats together, with the most musical action occurring in the second half of the slur. With the opening theme's swinging motion from the third beat into the next downbeat, the performers must apply considerable rhythmic energy to launch into the next measure. Yet, when beginning the piece on a down bow, this third beat will occur in the upper half of the bow, which produces less sound than the lower half. In order to ensure a focused sound and energetic

swing through the third beat, the performer must both save bow on the first half of the measure and increase weight in the second half of the measure. The piano plays a descending arpeggio on the third beat while the viola plays an ascending arpeggio. This contrary motion helps the viola remain prominent; nevertheless, the violist must still create a clear and projecting sound on the third beat. When this gesture reappears at m. 28, the problem is exacerbated by the printed crescendo, the indicated down bow, and the more thickly scored piano writing (ex. 5.23).

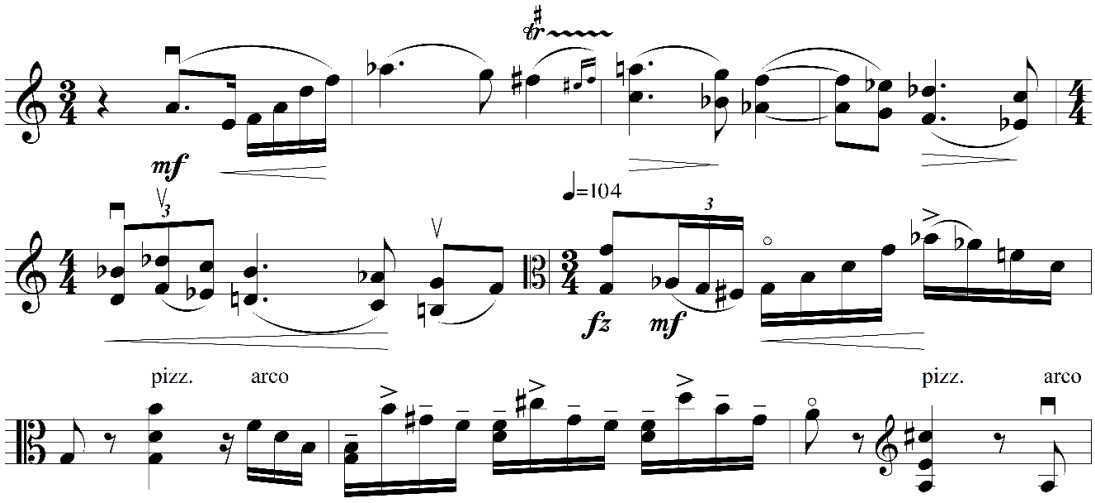


Example 5.22. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt I, mm. 1–2.



Example 5.23. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt I, mm. 28–29. The opening gesture with thicker piano scoring.

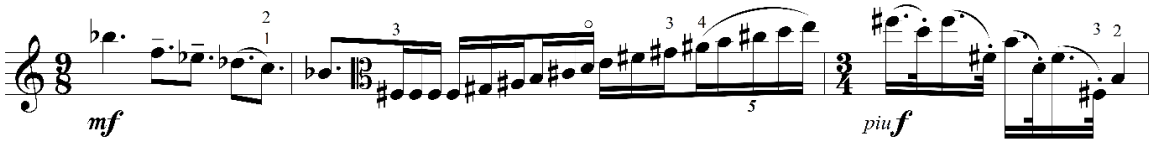
Bliss constructed his sonata as an assemblage of contrasting themes, rather than around one or two tightly developed motives. This compositional method requires the violist to nimbly shift moods and articulations at a moment's notice, or with only one or two measures of transition. This demand is especially great in the first movement, which contains no fewer than eleven distinct thematic elements. In the transitional passage from mm. 28–32 (ex. 5.24, mm. 28–36), the violist plays a legato ***mf*** melody in sixths that derives from the movement's opening theme. Each bow lasts for two beats until m. 32. Then, at m. 33, a new theme suddenly appears, characterized by arpeggiated sixteenth notes with irregular accents, all to be played with separate *détaché* bow strokes. This transition from legato to *détaché* requires a flexible bow arm and accurate bow placement to facilitate the contrasting articulations.



Example 5.24. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt I, mm. 28–36. Quick transition from legato to accented détaché *bow strokes.*

A similar instance occurs in the third movement (ex. 5.25, mm. 96–98), this time with three bowing elements at play: lyrical melody sprinkled with tenuto markings, fast *détaché*-bowed scales, and hooked dotted sixteenth/thirty-second note figures (also known as the Viotti stroke).[91] In the span of three measures, the violist must transition from a soaring treble melody to a rapidly ascending scale, and then to martial *più forte* dotted rhythms. In this passage, the difficulty lies not only in executing fast transitions but also in mustering the right-arm energy to make everything speak clearly, which leads into the final topic of bow-arm technique to be covered: endurance.

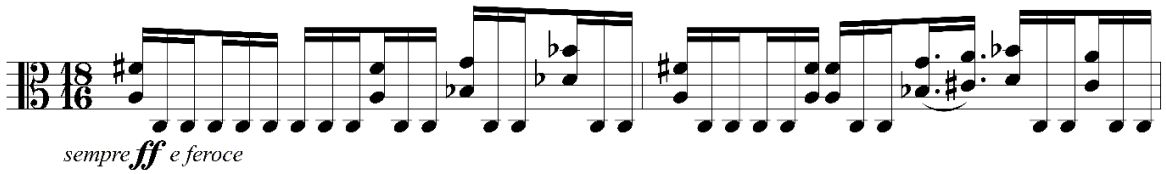
[91] "Bow Stroke Link," Stringpedagogy.com, Mimi Zweig, last modified November 2018, http://stringpedagogy.com/members/volumes/vol_2/link_bow_strokes.htm.



Example 5.25. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 96–98. Rapid changes in style.

With only eight multiple-measure rests throughout its more than twenty-five-minute span, the sonata places a substantial physical demand on the violist. In addition to its paucity of rests, the sonata is tilted more towards the *forte* end of the dynamic spectrum than towards *piano,* which requires a greater amount of bow-arm energy. Additionally, after playing the first and second movements, which last around eighteen minutes, the violist must tackle the most physically-demanding movement of the work, the virtuosic and unrelenting "Furiant." With only about three seconds of rests, this movement offers little chance for the violist to relax. The *moto perpetuo* character of its opening theme combines with dotted figures and *fortissimo* scales to press the limits of viola-playing endurance. And all of this happens before the Hindemith-ian viola "cadenza" that concludes the movement, marked *sempre **ff** e feroce* (ex. 5.26). On top of this, the movement transitions *attacca* into the work's final movement, "Coda." Outside of its left-hand challenges, the third movement requires a nimble and flexible bow arm, and the violist must conserve energy at the movement's beginning to have enough left for the concluding cadenza's *feroce* character. From the technical perspective, it is important to find a variety of solutions to create the loud and extroverted characters in the movement. Relying only on a single element of sound production (bow weight or bow

speed) will result in right-arm fatigue and make the ending cadenza difficult to perform with ease.



Example 5.26. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 224–25. The beginning of the viola "cadenza."

5.3 Ensemble Considerations

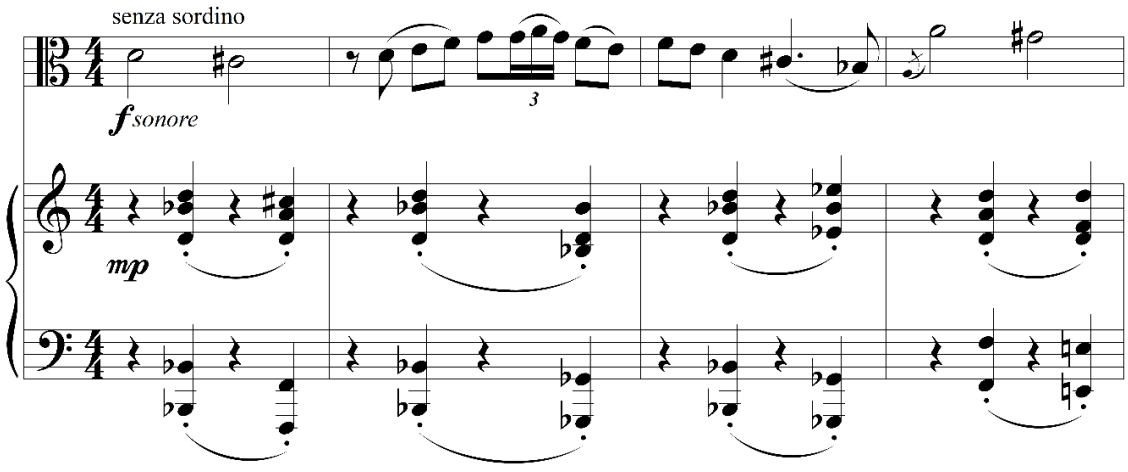
5.3.1 Balance

When recounting the composition of the sonata, Bliss wrote that "it was really becoming a concerto for the instrument" before expressing his unrealized plans to "translate the piano accompaniment into an orchestra tissue."[92] His impulse for this seems to come from two sources: the practical, i.e., having the vehicle of a virtuoso performer—Tertis—to present the work; and the musical, i.e., the work's grandiosity, both in variety of thematic material and grandiose musical gestures. The latter aspect means that, even in its viola and piano scoring, problems of balance are frequently encountered. However, in the same passage cited above, Bliss mentioned his awareness of balance issues when writing for viola: "taking care that the mellow dark sombre tone of the solo instrument was not obscured by a too thick surround." Throughout the sonata, he makes generous attempts in scoring to allow the viola to speak clearly above the piano. The most obvious instance of this occurs in the sonata's first two measures. After the piano's pick-up half

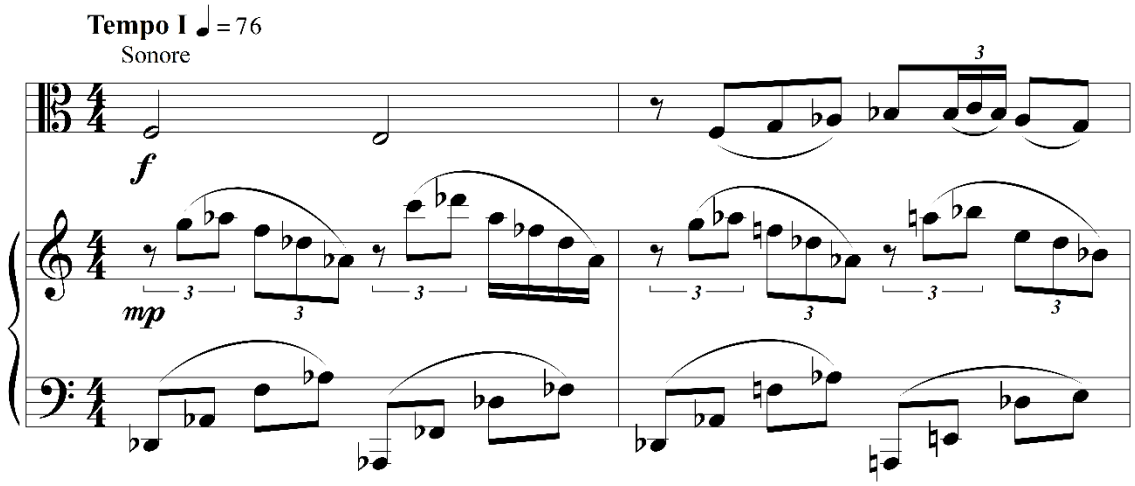
[92] Bliss, *As I Remember*, 102.

note in m. 1, the viola enters on an F on the C-string, its lowest and darkest string. Bliss was clearly attuned to this acoustical fact, as his expressive text displays his concept of balance: the viola is marked at a ***mf*** dynamic and *dolce e sonore*, while the piano plays a ***piano*** dynamic, *sotto voce* (see ex. 5.22, mm. 1–2). The two instruments play at the different dynamic levels until m. 7, when both are marked ***mp***. But here, the viola's leading treble melody is well above the piano's single-line-accompanimental figures, which allows for easy balance between voices despite playing at the same dynamic level.

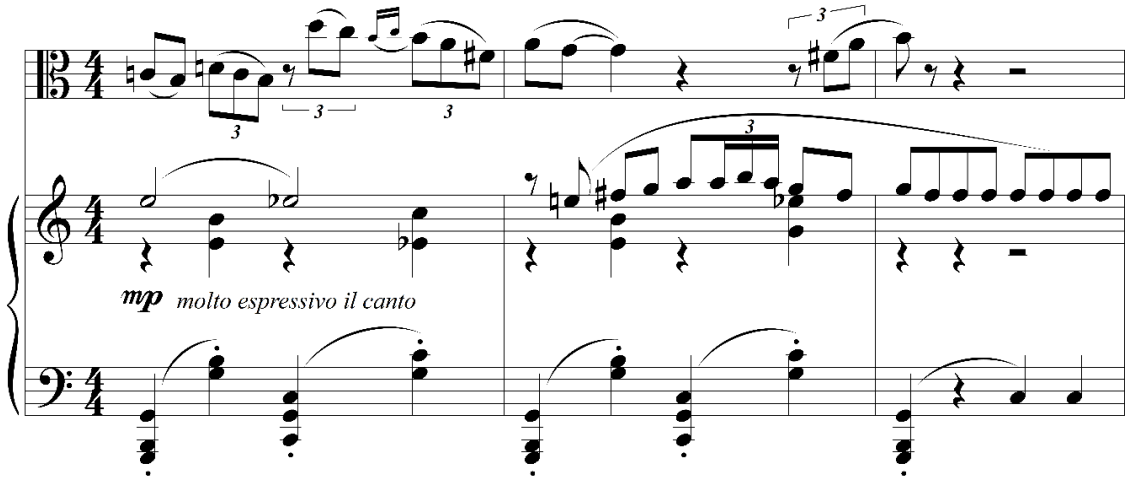
Bliss's acute attention to ensemble balance is later revealed in the second movement. For each appearance of the primary theme, Bliss applies unique dynamic and timbre markings depending on which instrument plays the leading line. Both instances where the viola plays the melody (m. 8 and m. 113) have the same markings: ***f*** and *sonore* for the viola, and ***mp*** for the piano (ex. 5.27a and 5.27b). When the piano plays the melody at m. 25, Bliss makes room for the viola's filigree triplets, marking the piano's melody ***mp*** *molto espressivo il canto,* and the viola ***mp*** (ex. 5.27c).



Example 5.27a, Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt II, mm. 8–11. The viola plays the first appearance of the melody.



Example 5.27b, mvt II, mm. 113–114. The viola plays the main melody a second time.



Example 5.27c, mvt II, mm. 25–26. The melody played in the piano.

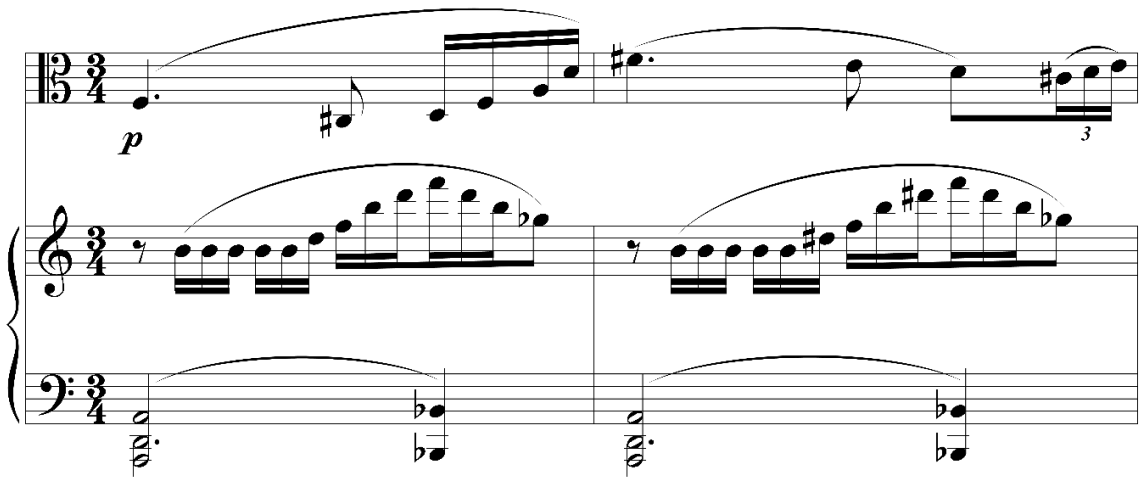
Later, in the third movement's viola "cadenza," Bliss reins in the piano by marking its rumbling C's ***mp*** *(senza pedale)* against the viola's *sempre* ***ff*** *e feroce.* The piano remains hushed for the first twenty-five measures of the cadenza, and only reaches ***ff*** three measures before the movement's conclusion. While Bliss generally succeeds in

allowing each instrument aural space to sound clearly, several moments of thick scoring require adjustments from the performer. These are discussed below in the context of musical expression.

5.3.2 Rhythm and Tempo

In terms of musical performance, Bliss was also well aware of the importance of rhythmic flow and tempo. He wrote that "a right pulse is for me the first essential factor in pleasurable listening," and that his music "must move on, and not be static; that is the very essence of my own character."[93] Applying Bliss's same level of importance to this aspect of performance results in an effective and gripping reading of the sonata. As mentioned above, the "pick-up" nature of the first movement's main theme requires that the music flow unencumbered into the following measures, tumbling forward with a swooping character. This feeling, however, cannot be applied wholesale to every iteration of this theme. When it returns in the final movement at m. 39, Bliss combines it with the triplet figures from the third movement to create a plodding, dirge-like mood. In order to accurately achieve this heavy effect, the forward-moving feeling from the first movement must be replaced with a restricted and held tempo (ex. 5.28).

[93] Arthur Bliss, *As I Remember* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 102.

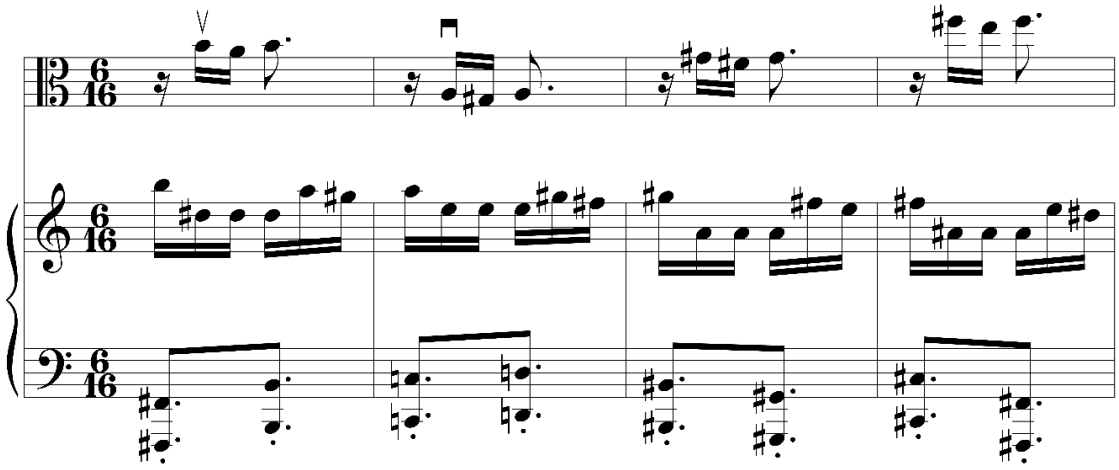


Example 5.28. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt IV, mm. 39–40. The first movement's main theme is combined with the triplets from the third movement.

A synthesis of these two characters—heaviness and rhythmic flow—also needs to occur in the opening of the second movement. Beginning in the first measure, the viola's pizzicato must move forward, tracing the contour of the line, so that music avoids stagnation. When the main theme begins in m. 8, the viola is again tasked with singing forward (especially with its moving notes in m. 9); but this time, the piano's weak-beat five-note chords with their distorted tonic-dominant motion inhibit the viola's active, forward-pressing character. The tension between these two characters, if adequately presented, will produce a compelling expressive effect. As Bliss's figuration expands both in pitch level and variety of rhythms, the piano's weak-beat chords shift to the strong beat when it takes over the melody, resulting in a more stable and *cantabile* character (see exs. 5.27a and 5.27c).

The difficulty in the third movement lies not in its rhythmic mood or tempo fluctuations, but in choosing a steady tempo and adhering to it throughout. Despite the changes in notated meter, the beat should remain consistent for the entire movement.

What matters more, though, is that the pulse does not push forward and increase, which is an easy temptation due to the triplet figures. Other potential places where the tempo can be interrupted are during the hocket-like melody in mm. 79–83 (ex. 5.29) and the conflicting duple vs. triple subdivisions beginning in m. 98 (see ex. 5.24).



Example 5.29. Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt III, mm. 79–82. The hocket-like passing of melodic lines between the piano's right hand and viola.

5.4 Musical Expression

Beyond the technical means of faithfully executing the notes, the sonata presents several expressive challenges. Starting from the widest vantage point, a successful performance must make sense of the formal structure of the work. None of the movements exhibit a traditional form, such as sonata, rondo, or variation form. Attempting to superimpose these forms upon the work will only lead to confusion of both the performer and the audience. The first movement is especially susceptible to a sonata form (A B A`) misreading. It presents a fairly clear opening theme that recurs at various points throughout the work, and other elements appear in a similar relative order in the

beginning and later part of the movement. But there is no clear exposition-development-recapitulation structure, and Bliss introduces new thematic elements even within the final twenty measures of the movement.

In the third of his lectures entitled "Aspects of Contemporary Music" (1934), Bliss articulates a formal principle that proves useful for understanding the first movement of the Viola Sonata. He states that there are two ways to create unity in a composition, one of them being

> unity in diversity, the employment not of one idea that spreads, but of two or more antagonistic ideas that are gradually compelled to harmonize and form one complete whole. This implies drama and struggle, and is the formal idea lying behind the first movement of a Beethoven Sonata, for instance. The first develops from a single thematic idea, the second is based on the interaction of several contrasted ones.[94]

While Bliss, writing elsewhere, mentions just two opposing ideas in the first movement,[95] I identify no less than eleven unique thematic elements. Many of these elements are motivically related when they are stripped down to their essences; but, from a performing rather than analytical perspective, they each exhibit a unique musical character. This is, in fact, true throughout the entire sonata, not just the first movement. So, the over-arching expressive challenge of this sonata lies in handling this multitude of themes, absent an obvious and recognizable stock form.

The first challenge in this process is creating a unique expressive identity for each theme. In order to achieve this multitudinous effect, each theme must be played in a way that contrasts its adjacent themes. This demands that the performer exaggerate each

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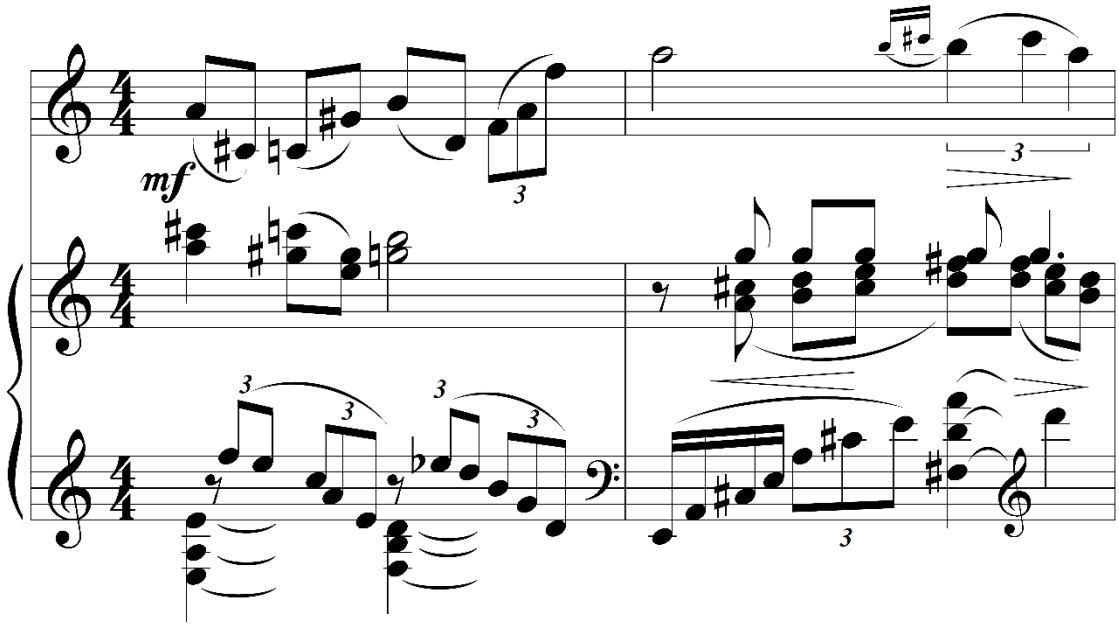
[94] Arthur Bliss, "Aspects of Contemporary Music," in *Bliss on Music*, ed. Gregory Roscow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102.
[95] Arthur Bliss, "Sonata for Viola and Piano," in *Bliss on Music*, ed. Gregory Roscow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 284.

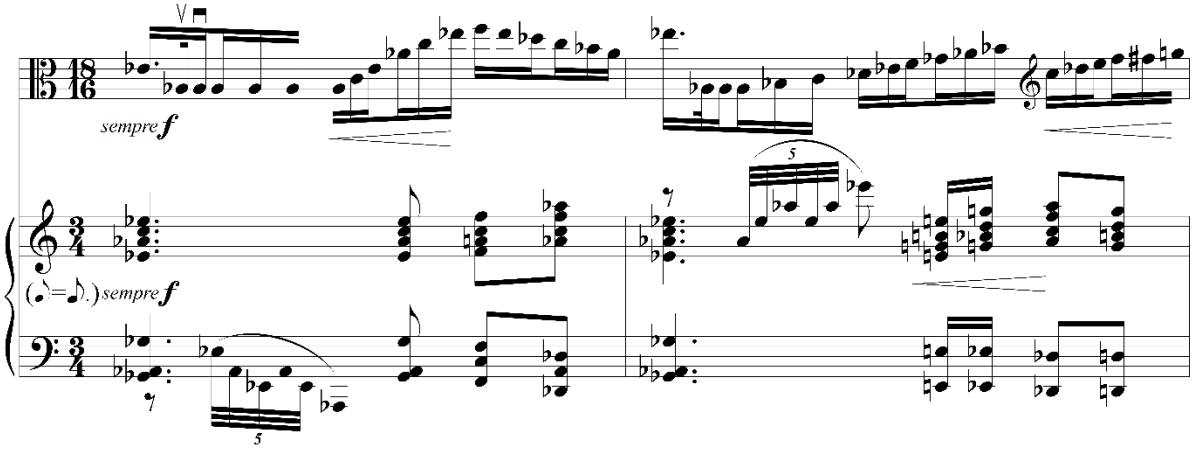
character so that the audience can recognize each element in this vast network of themes. Aspects of performance including articulation, density of sound, dynamic color, rubato, attack and release, and vibrato must all called upon to create this individualization of themes.

Two other challenges in this realm deal with the proximity of themes. As mentioned above, Bliss often writes little or no transition between highly contrasting themes. This requires the performer to quickly transition both in technical execution (e.g. bow strokes, left-hand positions, sounding point, etc.) and in musical and expressive means. The demand, therefore, is both physical and mental.

In addition to rapid transitions between themes, Bliss often presents multiple themes simultaneously, creating a multi-layered effect. Two of these moments are shown in examples 5.30 and 5.31. In the example from the second movement, the movement's third theme—a rising and falling sixths gesture—appears in the viola part, while the piano plays the movement's second theme. Then, in the next measure, the piano introduces the opening pizzicato theme, somewhat obscured in its second-highest voice. In the course of two measures, three separate themes are presented across the ensemble. In the excerpt from the third movement (ex. 5.31), Bliss not only superimposes different themes but different meters as well. He combines a new theme in the piano's uppermost voice with the movement's opening sixteenth-note arpeggiated theme. In both examples, determining the voicing and balance of these themes is an expressive question that must be addressed by the performers for an effective performance.



Example 5.30, Arthur Bliss, Viola Sonata, mvt II, mm. 58–59



Example 5.31, mvt. III, mm. 84–85.

Handling all of these contrasting themes not only challenges the performer's imaginative and technical processes, but it also causes mental fatigue, thereby affecting endurance. Just as the rapid changes in bow strokes and repeated gestures cause fatigue in

the right arm, having to quickly change between characters and moods results in mental fatigue. In this work with few moments of repose, the performers must practice this character-switching routine just as much as the physical changes in notes.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

For a variety of reasons, this work deserves greater study, increased performance, and inclusion into the standard recital repertoire for the viola. Above all, the sonata's musical and expressive attributes merit this deepened attention. Bliss imbues every element of the work—from its large-scale, cyclical form to the motivic unity across its themes—with a deftness of compositional craft and artistic creativity that gives the work an appealing freshness. From a historical perspective, the sonata captures the remarkable influence between virtuoso performer and composer, standing as a landmark testament to this type of collaboration. Of the many works resulting from Tertis's collaborations with composers, Bliss's sonata ranks among the most virtuosic in terms of its technical demands and elusive expressivity. Compared to more popular works such as the sonatas of York Bowen (also written for Tertis) and Vaughan Williams's viola pieces, Bliss's sonata offers more adventurous harmonic writing, a wider variety of technical writing for both viola and piano, and a broader expressive palate. For a piece that is tonally defined by traditional harmonies (as opposed to more non-traditional tonal viola works by composers like Hindemith, Bartók, and Bloch), it contains an amount of harmonic ingenuity not found in similarly styled works for viola, with the exception of Walton's Concerto being perhaps the only work with similar or greater harmonic inventiveness. While several of the English works written for Tertis—such as Bax's *Phantasy* op. 54, Bowen's *Phantasy* and two sonatas, and Vaughan Williams's Suite—have enjoyed greater prominence on the concert stage, Bliss's sonata is wholly deserving of equal or even more recognition from performers.

From a programming perspective, the amount of fresh musical material in Bliss's Sonata allows it to function and myriad ways on the concert program. In an all-English program, it can serve as an emotional and expressive heavyweight in contradistinction to a lighter work, like Vaughan Williams's Suite. It can also balance well with Britten's *Lachrymae*, off-setting that work's more abstract narrative. I have performed the work alongside Hindemith's similarly monumental Sonata for viola and piano (1939). This pairing showcases two works from the 1930s that each uniquely grapple with musical elements from the past (formal design for Hindemith, and tonality for Bliss). Their striking dissimilarities—at least in surface texture and compositional style—display the wealth and variety of viola music in the first half of the twentieth century. Another, albeit less traditional, programming idea would be to play the third movement alone as an encore piece or short showpiece. The short length, virtuoso character, and conclusive ending of the *furiant* make it an ideal encore piece.

As a work of performance study, the student can gain multitudes from Bliss's Sonata. The most prominent and exacting techniques employed in this sonata are double stops (sixths specifically) and upper register playing, as discussed in chapter 4. In order to handle the sonata's demands in these realms, students should be fluent in three-octave scales, arpeggios, and double stops, and have successfully studied etudes such as Kreutzer's 42 Studies and Campagnoli's Caprices. The work also presents many ensemble challenges. Students who have successfully performed works like Schumann's *Märchenbilder*, Vieuxtemps's Sonata, and JS Bach's Gamba sonatas would be prepared to handle the ensemble difficulties posed by Bliss's sonata.

With all of these ideas in mind, I hope that this document provides readers with a clear and detailed understanding of Bliss's Viola Sonata, enabling more informed and widespread performances of this valuable work.

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DMA RECITALS

RECITAL 1

1930s Viola and Piano Sonatas

November 7, 2015
The Niles Gallery
4:30pm

Andrew Braddock, viola
Bernadette Lo, piano

Sonata for viola and piano (1939) — Paul Hindemith (1895–1963)
- Breit. Mit Kraft
- Sehr lebhaft
- Phantasie—
- Finale (mit 2 Variationen)

Sonata for viola and pianoforte (1933) — Arthur Bliss (1891–1975)
- Moderato
- Andante
- Furiant—
- Coda

This recital features two monumental sonatas for viola and piano from the 1930s: Paul Hindemith's Sonata for Viola and Piano (1939), and Arthur Bliss's Sonata for Viola and Piano (1933).

Though Hindemith is remembered today primarily as a composer and pedagogue, he was one of the leading performing violists of his time. He premiered all seven of his sonatas (four for solo viola, three for viola and piano) for the viola. Hindemith wrote this Sonata, referred to as the 1939 Sonata, between July 1938 and April 1939. He finished composing the sonata during his third concert tour of the United States in 1939. Most notably, he wrote the second movement on a train ride from Los Angeles to New York.

Shortly after premiering the work on April 23, 1939, at the New York Town Hall, Hindemith recorded it with pianist Jesús María Sanromá for RCA Victor. The only other of his viola sonatas that he recorded was the Sonata for Solo Viola, op. 25 no. 1.

Hindemith described the work as "a powerful, robust piece with enough substance to survive hard times." The first movement—*Breit. Mit Kraft*—loosely follows traditional sonata form. The exposition contains two themes and a closing theme. The first theme is muscular and plodding, defined by dotted rhythmic figures. Both viola and piano enter together without introduction on the downbeat of the piece, creating an almost *in medias res* effect. The second theme presents a more lyrical and horizontal character, contrasting with the vertical forthrightness of the first theme. Both themes contain motivic similarities, each relying heavily on perfect fourths and semitones. The closing theme, the shortest of the three, crashes in *Sehr energisch* after the syncopated, deflating conclusion of the second theme. It revives the dotted figures and heavy verticality of the first theme while adding furiously twisting thirty-second note runs into the mix. The development section features with a fugato (*Ruhig, aber immer fließend)* whose theme consists of chains of perfect fourths. After the beginning of the recapitulation, this time with the second theme presented first, Hindemith changes into triple compound meter, transforming the first theme's rigidity into a freely swinging character. The closing theme serves as the movement's coda, bringing it to a thunderous conclusion.

The second movement is a sort of skittering scherzo, characterized by off-kilter rhythms juxtaposed with wandering perfect-fourth melodic lines. The movement adheres to a general A B A` form. Its middle section features repeated chordal figures that are reminiscent of those in the middle movement of Walton's Viola Concerto (which

Hindemith premiered as soloist). The jazziness of the A section's hemiola figures finds its counterpart in brief, Ragtime-esque figures in the B section. The energy from the first two movements is sublimated into the eerie and searching figures of the third movement, *Phantasie*. After a hushed opening, the viola introduces the arpeggios that go on to dominate the musical structure of the rest of the movement. A brief eruption of bold and fast music gradually subsides back into the searching music from the beginning as the movement finishes with an unstable and inconclusive harmony. The final movement is a theme with two variations, structured into another A B A` form. The theme opens with a sprawling fourteen-measure phrase, full of perfect-fourth intervals, dotted rhythms, and halting gestures. The first variation is its own miniature movement. Couched almost entirely in ***pp*** and ***ppp*** dynamics, the short and fleeting gestures here are reminiscent of Bartók's night-music style. The second variation revives the playful character of the second movement but in a more rhythmically stable format. The piece closes with a gradual ritardando over the course of its final 21 measures, creating a heavy and well-earned sense of finality.

While Hindemith wrote his sonata for one of the great violists of the day (himself), Arthur Bliss wrote his for the unquestioned leading violist of the time: Lionel Tertis (1876–1975). Bliss (1891–1975) enjoyed a diverse musical career as one of the leading composers in England in the 20th century. Born to an English mother and an America father, Bliss's fairly standard education was interrupted by service in World War I in France, where he suffered a gas attack and experienced the horrors of war. His early mature compositions were deeply influenced by French styles, beginning with Debussy and Ravel and extending toward more avant-garde styles. But by the mid-1920s,

Bliss's wide-ranging experimentalism distilled into a more traditional mold as he produced weighty and well-wrought works, the most prominent being his *A Colour Symphony* of 1922.

Bliss wrote in his autobiography that he "like[s] the stimulus of words, or a theatrical setting, a colourful occasion, or the collaboration of a great player." For the Viola Sonata (1933), he found a vibrant collaborator in the person of Lionel Tertis. By 1933, Tertis was not only the greatest living violist but one of the leading figures in England's musical culture. Tertis played an integral role in the creation of the Sonata, as Bliss wrote that "I think my Viola Sonata should have Tertis's name coupled with mine as joint composers." The viola writing in the sonata reflects many of Tertis's signature strengths: high registers, double stops, and frequent stylistic shifts. Tertis premiered the work in public with pianist Solomon on November 3, 1933, at a performance in the BBC Broadcasting House, and went on to perform the Sonata frequently for many years.

The work is structured into four movements in which the final movement, Coda, is connected *attacca* to the third and brings together themes from the preceding movements. The first movement is the most extensive of the work. It contains at least eleven separate themes. The movement's initial theme, its most prominent, establishes the rolling and swinging 3/4 meter and the major-minor false relation that threads through the entire work. Bliss traverses a vast array of expressive areas, from coy playful music to tempestuous dissonances to sweet sentimental music. Though Bliss brings back themes in a similar order in which the initially appear, the movement has more of a through-composed form rather than adhering to a specific, traditional form.

The second movement is the expressive heart of the sonata. Following a mysterious pizzicato introduction, Bliss presents his most cogent and artfully crafted theme in the viola, accompanied by plodding off-beat chords in the piano. The theme sways between a feeling of portentousness and melancholic sweetness, sometimes resting unsettlingly in between. The movement gradually builds in intensity to the viola's upper register as the piano unleashes an apocalyptic cadenza-like passage. Following this, the aforementioned theme returns and Bliss bookends the movement with the pizzicato music from its opening.

Pushing the performers to their technical limits, Bliss's third movement is a virtuosic and relentless *furiant.* The meter freely shifts between duple and triple (and sometimes with both subdivisions simultaneously) and the figuration goes from dotted arpeggios to breath-taking scales. The movement concludes with a growling and violent viola cadenza centered around the open C-string, reminiscent of the famous fourth movement from Hindemith's Solo Viola Sonata, op. 25 no. 1. The cadenza leads *attacca* into the final movement, Coda. After a recitative-like opening, Bliss revives motives and themes from the first three movements, combining and contrasting them to create something brand new yet familiar at the same time. The work concludes with a powerful and hopeless D-minor ***fff*** in both viola and piano.

RECITAL 2

Masterworks for Viola

February 28, 2016
Singletary Recital Hall
1:00 pm

Andrew Braddock, viola
Bernadette Lo, piano

Sonata, op. 11 no. 4 (1919) — Paul Hindemith (1895–1963)
- Fantasie—
- Thema mit Variationen—
- Finale (mit Variationen)

Suite in G major, BWV 1007 (c1720) — J.S. Bach (1685–1750)
- Prelude
- Allemande
- Courante
- Sarabande
- Menuet I and II
- Gigue

Sonata in B-flat major, op. 36 (1860) — Henry Vieuxtemps (1820–1881)
- Maestoso–Allegro
- Barcarolla: Andante con moto
- Finale scherzando: Allegretto

This recital presents three masterworks for viola from three separate musical eras: Baroque, Romantic, and Modern.

Paul Hindemith's (1895–1963) Sonata op. 11 no. 4 is the most beloved and frequently performed of his seven sonatas for viola (four solo sonatas and three with piano). Hindemith is remembered today primarily as a composer and a pedagogue, but he

was also one of Europe's leading performing violists whose notable performing highlights include the premiere of Walton's Viola Concerto. Yet, by 1919, the year in which he composed this sonata, Hindemith began to think of himself primarily as a composer even though he continued to perform until the 1940s.

The sonata consists of three movements played without pause. The first movement, entitled "Fantasie," begins with a lyrical and luscious melodic line in the viola that starts in its middle register, swings down to its lowest, and then floats up the highest, all in the course of the first ten measures. It is as if Hindemith the violist, in his first viola sonata, is introducing the audience to the many timbral qualities of the instrument. The movement continues in a dream-like state, interweaving the lyrical melody with decorative passage-work in both piano and viola. The character, figuration, and tone color make this one of Hindemith's most Debussy-like movements. After a forceful climax, a solitary A-sharp in the viola bridges the gap into the second movement, which is a set four variations on a theme. The G-flat major/E-flat minor theme features chromatic twists of color amidst its lyrical melody, marked "Ruhig und einfach, wie ein Volkslied" (Calm and simply, like a folk song). The first two variations similarly inhabit the dreamy mood as the first movement, while variations three and four grow extroverted and aggressive. The dramatic fourth variation crashes headlong into the beginning of the third and final movement ("Finale mit Variationen"). Here, Hindemith continues the variations from the previous movement (there are seven variations between the two movements), while also creating a sonata-like form through the contrast and return of the movement's opening accented melody and its flowing lyrical melody. The most richly characteristic variation, number six, is marked "Fugato, mit bizarrer Plumpheit

vorzutragen" (Fugato, with bizarre clumsiness going forward). This moment conveys an expressionistic caricature mood, in which the extreme exaggeration of expression is encouraged. The roaring coda includes dynamic markings—***ffff***—and expressive indications—"mit aller Kraft" (with all power)—that push the performers to their most extreme physical limits, powerfully concluding this majestic sonata.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) wrote his Six Suites for solo cello around the year 1720. Bach was living in Cöthen at the time, having been appointed by Prince Leopold of Cöthen to his first Kapellmeister position on August 5, 1717.

Unfortunately, any autograph manuscript for the suites is lost. Our understanding of the suites comes from four handwritten copies, all with varying degrees of proximity to Bach. The copy from Anna Magdalena, Bach's second wife who he married on December 3, 1721, in Cöthen, is the closest personally to J.S. Bach. Her copy was made in 1727. Another of the manuscripts was made a year earlier by Johann Peter Kellner, Bach's most prolific copyist. Frustratingly, there exist many discrepancies in slurs even between these two copies, not to mention the other two. For the performance today, I have created my own edition based on Magdalena's, Kellner's, and the other two manuscripts. By comparing all the manuscripts and finding the places where they all agree, I hoped to create an edition that is closest to Bach's missing original that also includes my own preferences.

Each of the six suites contains six movements: a prelude and five dance movements. The famous G-major Prelude is, save for a few measures, comprised almost completely of arpeggios. Even with this seemingly rigid composition restriction, Bach

crafts a flowing and powerful opening statement for the suite. The Allemande, which is the first of the binary dance movements, is the most chromatically rich movement in the Suite. A generally slower dance, it features twisting and winding lines, interspersed with dotted-eight sixteenth figures. The lively Courante is a triple-meter dance movement that contrasts leaping arpeggios with horizontal running sixteenth notes. Of the six movements in this suite, it provides the most moments to display Baroque virtuosity. The Sarabande has its origins in Latin America and Spain and was notably banned in Spain in 1583 for its obscenity. It is a slower dance, and its three-beat measures are essentially divided into two parts: the first is a single beat, and the second lasts for two beats. This leads to an emphasis and stretched-out feeling on the second part of the measure. This Sarabande contains several keening tritone leaps but eventually concludes with a set comforting and calming two-note gestures. The Menuet was the only dance that was still actively danced in Bach's times, and the two menuets here are the most straightforward, both harmonically and motivically, dance movements of the suite. Set in contrasting keys of G major and G minor, they easily dart around the instrument's range, allowing for clear contrapuntal motion. The concluding Gigue is the only movement in a compound meter, 6/8. Its three-note grouping and sixteenth-note figures provide for an energetic and propulsive conclusion to the suite.

Henry Vieuxtemps's Sonata in B-flat, op. 36 is by far his most substantial work for the viola, and in turn, one of the great Romantic-era sonatas for the instrument. While his other works for the viola—*Élégie* (op. 30, ca. 1850), *Capriccio* (op. post.), and *Étude* (without opus number)—show his interest in the instrument, the Sonata displays a greater

depth of attention and exploration of the viola's nuanced and subtle timbre. Vieuxtemps was known worldwide as a virtuoso violinist, but the violinist-composer also played viola throughout his performing career. He wrote the work in 1860 (around the same time as his beloved Violin Concerto no. 5) and premiered it himself on January 21, 1861, in London. He later performed the work on tour throughout the British Isles before returning to his home in Brussels to perform it in May 1861.

The three-movement work opens with a luxurious *maestoso* as the viola's whole-note melody showcases the rich colors of its lower register, accompanied by rolled chords in the piano. After this lyrical and rich introduction, propulsive triplets usher in the movement's main Allegro section, leading into the extroverted and scalar main theme. The movement hosts a wide variety of themes: energetic running sixteenth notes; hushed ***pp*** legato arpeggiated figures; woeful, tragic-sounding melodies; and scherzo-like triplets. After its most thunderous climax, a brief viola cadenza leads into a truncated reprisal of the introduction, and the movement is capped off by a short coda based on the work's main theme.

Three music ideas comprise the second movement, a 6/8 Barcarolla in G minor. The first is the opening G-minor theme where the viola sings in its upper register. After the first section comes to a fiery conclusion, the movement's second section begins, now in the key of G major, featuring flowing sixteenths. A brief agitated section, marked *animato,* introduces a rumbling three-note motive that eventually carries over into the reiteration of the opening G-minor section.

The third and final movement gains its musical energy from a tension between a simple lyrical melody and heavily ornamented passagework. With chromatic scales,

flashy arpeggios, and double stops, this is the most virtuosic movement of the sonata. After a searing chromatically ascending passage, the work comes to a rousing, *più forte* conclusion with rapid double stops in the viola and an octave-doubled melody in the piano.

RECITAL 3

Music for Viola, Voice, and Piano

April 9th, 2016
Singletary Recital Hall
7:00pm

Andrew Braddock, viola
Liza Kelly, mezzo-soprano
Bernadette Lo, piano

Zwei Gesänge, op. 91 — Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
- Gestillte Sehnsucht
- Geistliches Wiegenlied

Two Pieces for viola and piano — Frank Bridge (1879–1941)
- Pensiero
- Allegro Appassionato

Three songs for voice, viola, and piano — Frank Bridge
- Far, far from each other
- Where is it that our soul doth go?
- Music when soft voices die

Sonata in f minor, op. 120 no. 1 — Johannes Brahms
- Allegro appassionato
- Andante in poco Adagio
- Allegretto grazioso
- Vivace

This recital centers around two works for viola, voice and piano and pairs them with works by the same composers for viola and piano.

The two works by Johannes Brahms on this program are some of the most beloved Romantic-era works for viola. His two sonatas, op. 120 nos. 1 and 2, were originally written for clarinet, and are now some of the most frequently performed works for viola and piano. Late in his compositional career, Brahms received an upsurge of creative energy thanks to the inspiring playing of clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld. Mühlfeld,

formerly a violinist, served as principal clarinetist in the Meiningen Court Orchestra and was the director of the Court Theater when Brahms met him in 1891. After hearing Mühlfeld's playing, Brahms quickly wrote two works, the Clarinet Trio, op. 114, and the Clarinet Quintet, op. 115, during the summer of 1891, and dedicated both to Mühlfeld. In the summer of 1894, after a trip to Bad Ischl, Brahms wrote Mühlfeld telling him that he had written "two modest sonatas" (zwei bescheidene Sonaten) for clarinet and piano. The two later performed the works privately in November 1894, and the public premieres followed in January 1895.

It seems that Brahms had early on conceived of creating a viola transcription of the sonatas. On October 14, 1895, he wrote to the violinist Joseph Joachim that he would bring the sonatas with a viola part for him to play with Clara Schumann on his upcoming visit to Frankfurt. Brahms mentioned the viola transcription in a letter to his publisher Simrock on February 26, 1895, and the viola versions of the sonatas were published in June 1895.

The F-minor sonata, op. 120 no. 1, spans a remarkably large emotional range over its four movements. The opening movement, Allegro appassionato, begins with a tumultuous and surging primary theme, first presented in the viola. The theme is anything but linear, traversing most of the viola's range with its vast leaps. The secondary theme retains this leap-filled structure but has a much more easy-going and lyrical character. The initial fiery mood returns in the closing theme. The sonata form proceeds with richly varied development and recapitulation sections and concludes with a wistful, major-mode coda.

The second movement, with its ABA` form, is one of Brahms's most beautiful instrumental songs. In the beginning, the viola sings a soaring melody with a fragmented, almost raindrop-like piano accompaniment. The movement is full of deceptive cadences and yearning, wide-reaching melodic leaps that heighten its dramatic pathos. The B section slips into the key of D-flat major for its more innocent, childlike melodies. The original melody from the A section returns twice—in the wrong keys—before the actual beginning of the A` section. The movement ends with a sense of peace and serenity.

Breaking the spell cast by the second movement, the third movement swings between alternate moods of *grazioso* playfulness and rollicking gruffness. The movement shares both its key center (A-flat major) and formal structure (ABA`) with the second movement, but their moods could hardly be more dissimilar. After the aforementioned swinging A section, Brahms's syncopated and relentlessly linear B section casts a mystical spell over the movement. The exuberant fourth movement is a free rondo form with its punctuation-like three-note motto occurring no fewer than twenty times. As Brahms gradually modulates from the original F-major key to its relative minor, D minor, the movement's energetic character fades to a more mellow, and later, vengeful mood. The original theme returns all the more vivaciously as the work concludes with an upsurge of excitement.

The story of Brahms's Two Songs, op. 91, is intertwined with his close friendship with the great violinist Joseph Joachim. Though the songs are grouped together as op. 91, they were written more than twenty years apart. Brahms wrote "Geistliches Wiegenlied" in 1864 for the birth of Johannes Joachim, the son of Joseph Joachim and his wife Amalie Joachim (née Schneeweiss), a mezzo-soprano. The speaker in the poetic text is the Virgin

Mary, who addresses the angles while rocking the baby Jesus to sleep. The text alludes to the future suffering of Jesus, which Brahms represents through tumultuous, F-minor music in the song's middle section. Brahms wrote the other song of the set in 1884 as the Joachim's marriage was crumbling. Joachim was a notoriously jealous husband and, suspecting his wife of infidelity, began divorce proceedings. Brahms wrote "Gestillte Sehnsucht" in an attempt to reunify—literally, and onstage—the troubled couple. While Brahms's gambit did not eventually succeed, we are left with one of his most lusciously beautiful works. Throughout the song, Brahms explores the rich timbral characteristics of the viola and mezzo-soprano. It follows a similar pattern as the other song, with comforting and warm outer sections and a more agitated middle section.

Frank Bridge (1879–1941), in addition to being one of the foremost English composers of his generation, had a substantial career as a performing violist. He played in three professional string quartets and even joined Joseph Joachim's quartet for a performance of Brahms's G major Sextet. Despite his closeness with the viola, Bridge wrote few works for the instrument. He wrote his *Two Pieces: Pensiero and Allegro appassionato* in 1906 at the request of Lionel Tertis for the first volume of *The Lionel Tertis Viola Library*, published by Stainer and Bell. They are almost diametrically opposed works. *Pensiero* is situated mostly in the viola's dark and husky range, with one notable phrase stretching up to its higher register. The music is almost non-teleological: it meanders through shifting colors and melodies, never seeming to complete a thought. *Allegro appassionato*, as the title suggests, is an extroverted and exuberant showpiece that makes liberal use of the viola's highest registers. Its main theme has unbridled energy and unrelenting forward motion.

Bridge's *Three Songs* for viola, voice, and piano were written around the same time as the *Two Pieces*, in 1906–1907. The first of the group, *Far, far from each other* sets a text by Matthew Arnold and is tinged with painful dissonances that make the pain of separation viscerally felt. *Where is it that our soul doth go?* is a translation of a poem by Heinrich Heine that explores, without a definitive answer, the question of an afterlife. It features both surging climaxes and depressingly empty moments. The final song, *Where soft voices go to die,* contains cascading arpeggios in the piano set against flowing melodies in the voice and viola. It is the least extreme of the three songs and brings the set to an easy conclusion.

VITA

Violist Andrew Braddock is currently on the faculty of Western Kentucky University (WKU) and the WKU Pre-College Strings Program. He teaches viola at the university and maintains a full pre-college studio of young violinists and violists. In the summers, he teaches at the Indiana University Summer String Academy and serves as the Director of the WKU Summer String Institute. He is the editor of the *Journal of the American Viola Society*, having previously served as the journal's New Music Editor, and is on the board of the American Viola Society. Andrew has given masterclasses throughout the United States and abroad, at institutions such as the Xi'an Conservatory (China), the Chinese Culture University (Taiwan), the Vanderbilt University, Indiana University Summer String Academy, and Oklahoma University. He is the principal violist of the Paducah Symphony Orchestra, and he regularly performs with the Nashville Symphony. He has presented pedagogy sessions at the Kentucky and Tennessee Music Educators Association conferences. In addition to his many recital performances in the Kentucky area, Andrew has performed in Taiwan, Israel, Austria, Indiana, New York, Florida, Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico. Andrew studied violin and viola pedagogy with Mimi Zweig at Indiana University and has taught in the IU String Academy. He holds a Masters in Viola performance from Indiana University, under the tutelage of Atar Arad, and a Bachelor of Music (*summa cum laude*) from Vanderbilt University, where he was awarded the Jean Keller Heard Prize for Excellence in string performance. His principal teachers are Atar Arad, Kathryn Plummer, and John Graham.